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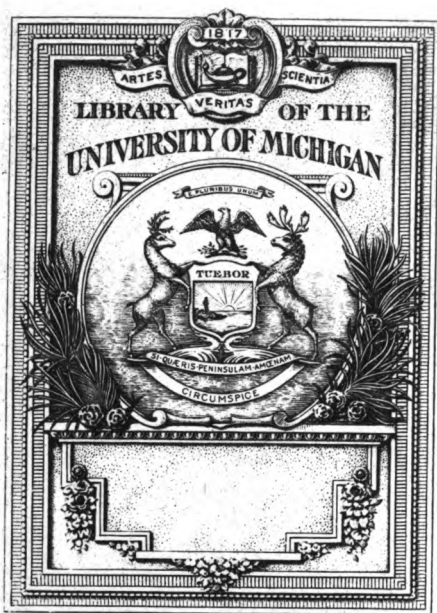




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'BLACKWOOD'

TALES FROM THE OUTPOSTS

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**‘Blackwood’
Tales from the Outposts**

**VII
SOLDIERS’ TALES**

Edited by
Lieut.-Colonel L. A. Bethell

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine

‘ Blackwood ’ Tales from the Outposts

VII SOLDIERS’ TALES



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SOLDIERS' TALES

I.

ODE TO ONE OF THE OLD INDIAN TROOPSHIPS NOW LYING UP AS A COAL HULK.

How art thou fallen, fallen from thy place !
Old Ship, in whom BRITANNIA did endraft
Even those best and noblest of their race,
Her Thin Red THOMAS (forrard), and (abaft)
Knights of all shape and sort,
Grim eld and giddy wart,¹
(Myself included) : when I see thee here,
Mastless, disfunnelled, black as Arthur's barge,
With pain I meditate thy proud career,
And think, how grave was thine imperial charge,
Thyself how very fine, and how exceeding large.

When thou didst start, what moving scenes were there !
How thronged the crowds to speed thee, outward-
bound !
What noise—what noise of cheering shocked the air :
What stern command : what scurryings : what wild
sound :

¹ A very young officer.

SOLDIERS' TALES

What language, too ! And what
Emotion, was there not,
When, at the climax, that misguided band
Plunged with grim aptness into *Auld Lang Syne* ;
And seasoned colonels, for the nonce unmanned,
Hemmed, and e'en rugged THOMAS of the Line
Dashed from his somethinged eyes the adjectival brine ?

Such was thy going ; but when fairly off,
Ah me, thy dalliance with the wanton gale !
Or whether thou didst wallow in the trough
(Heaving thy round white belly like a whale)
Or with ambitious screw
Winnowed the vain air—Ugh !
Enough ! That corkscrew throb—that mounting
poop—
Those qualms—those vivid qualms—are with me yet !
Lo, I smile wanly ! I am void ! I droop
Pensive the bulwarks o'er ! A great regret
Fulfil me—little more, and I should be upset !

Quit we those epic foolings ! Let us dream
Rather of those more chastened moods, when
thou,
Under prest sail and a good head of steam,
In lucid waters mirrored, helm to prow,
And with a prosperous wind
Shoving along behind,
Responsibly didst urge thy passage—Lord !
That was more like ! To see thee waddling by,
Pale landsmen bared the head ! E'en those aboard
(Call thee what names they might) could scarce
deny,
Thou Whited Sepulchre, a charm to fill the eye.

ODE TO ONE OF THE OLD INDIAN TROOPSHIPS

And if men cavilled at thy lack of haste,

Well, thou wert old, and when was age a crime ?

And, for those breakdowns in th' uncharted waste,

Those awful newsless lapses, time on time

One would again be struck

By thy surpassing luck !

So much so, that at last there came about

'Mongst those with private interests (either way)

A certain strained expectancy, a doubt,

Painful but sporting—one could never *say* !

Indeed, there *was* a tale ; whereto I shape my lay.

There was a Regiment, a mammoth Corps,

Whose chivalry—and legion was their name—

Kept ward ubiquitous the wide seas o'er,

Sighing for vacancies that never came—

Sighing for vacancies :

For ('twas a way of his)

Promotion long had languished on the roll,

Slow as an Orient river low in bed ;

And, with much waiting, many a fiery soul

Grew *passé*, or, as they expressed it, fed

Up, so to speak, as men that saw no luck ahead.

Then came a day when thou didst bear a freight,

Ah heavens, the goodliest was ever seen !

For there were common Captains of long date,

And larger veterans (room for all, I ween)

Whereof, of that one ' Arm,'

(Gods keep them safe from harm !)

A full six score put forth. And the time past

Barren of news. And men's hearts sank like stones.

Days turned to weeks. And many said, " At last,

She's done it ! " and in darkly boding tones

Made mourning for the lost, and breathed of DAVID JONES.

SOLDIERS' TALES

Then through that Royal Arm a great thrill ran ;
And many a knight, with prescient zeal ablaze,
Crushed his bereavement down, and straight began
To scorn delights and live laborious days,
Hoping 'gainst hope, to pass
C., D., and E.¹ Alas !

There came a happy tidings, All was well !
Swiftly that chestnut o'er the seas did go !

.
'Twas said, when those glad news untimely fell,
That all that Regiment, from high to low,
Were stricken as one man, and reeled beneath the blow !

¹ At that time, subjects for examination for promotion.

II.

THE GREEN CURVE.

“ Je créai six commissaires pour faire la description des bouches inutiles, et après bailler ce rôle à un chevalier de Saint-Jean de Malte, accompagné de 25 ou 30 soldats, pour les mettre dehors. . . .

“Ce sont les lois de la guerre ; il faut être cruel bien souvent pour venir à bout de son ennemi ; Dieu doit être bien miséricordieux en notre droit, qui faisons tant de maux.”—MONTLUC, ‘Siege of Sienna.’

I.

“ YES, you certainly make a point there—but I’m afraid it cannot be done. I quite see, of course, that under certain circumstances it might be advisable, purely from a military point of view ; but there are also other considerations—weighty considerations, I may say—and it cannot be done ; at least, not at present.” As he said these words the Minister put on his well-known smile—that smile which had disarmed so many.

“ But if not possible at present, do you not think we ought to be prepared to take this step shortly—at a moment’s notice ? ” replied the other.

“ Yes ; in so far as measures can be taken that will not cause excitement. You see—I’ll be frank with you ”—here the set smile again showed the teeth of the speaker under his carefully waxed black moustache—“ we cannot do it on account of the result that such action may have on the Public—we cannot afford to do it. The Public is ignorant of any such necessity, and would not understand. They are, of course, still quite confident, I hope

SOLDIERS' TALES

not unreasonably, and look upon the rosy side of affairs——”

“ Yes ; remember the Parisians and their cry of ‘ À Berlin ! ’ Remember——” interrupted the other.

But the mandarin suavely held up his hand and continued sonorously : “ And look upon the rosy side of things, as I say. Such an extreme—not to say drastic—step would certainly inflict great hardships on non-combatants and would excite apprehension. It would be bound to have an adverse effect on the Government. Believe me, we have considered the matter from all sides. Of course, I quite understand and, I hope, appreciate the line you are taking up : all the military advisers have—perhaps quite naturally—urged similar forcible methods ; but are not your fears somewhat groundless ? ”

At that moment there was a discreet tap at the door. A secretary entered and looked with a deferential air of inquiry at the Minister, who, seeing that he brought some papers, broke off his argument. The other bowed, and with a grunt of dissent strode to the window. As he stood reading with his back to the light his face was in shadow, but his attitude and manner of reading betokened a character the antithesis of that of the Minister, who was now immersed in the papers just brought in.

The business, which chiefly consisted in signing the papers handed to him, with now and then a word of explanation, did not take long. After a final “ Yes, sir, quite,” the secretary noiselessly vanished, and the Minister sat back, gently tapping his fingers together over his ample waistcoat. While endeavouring to recall the exact portion of his peroration reached before the interruption, he gazed benignly round the well-appointed room, which was large and had a long table in the centre. The number of despatch - boxes and the lavish display of official

THE GREEN CURVE

stationery upon the table showed it to be a Government office.

As the Minister sat on, tapping his finger-tips together, his cuffs made a rattling which at last attracted the attention of his more highly-strung companion, who looked up with a frown. Seeing that the secretary had gone, he returned to the charge.

"I think you should read this. You have not seen it: it has only just reached me. It's his last letter to me, in which he again specifically discusses this very point. As you will see, he demonstrates once more that if things go at all against us, the place is bound to be besieged, and that either the useless civil population should be sent away now at once, or a very much larger food-supply stored there than has heretofore been arranged for or contemplated. He favours the former course, as making matters simpler and easier for the defence. But see for yourself what he says—the portion of his letter on this subject begins here. As you know, he is no alarmist, and his opinion, supporting as it does so many others, must surely carry great weight."

The Minister took the papers but did not read. "I don't think it will do much good, General, my wading through all this"—he flipped through the pages. "I know it all: I have seen former reports, and I don't suppose there's anything new. It represents the ultra-military point of view, which has been already considered. We have decided, if possible, to quietly increase the stock of food so as to provide for the whole population. Of course, if opportunity offers, we might—er—persuade a few old people to go; but we must wait till the Public realises the necessity for the move before doing anything on a large scale. Perhaps people will then go readily and not have to be forced. Compulsion is always so

SOLDIERS' TALES

undesirable in these matters. Then, possibly, we might leave the matter to the discretion of the future Military Governor of the place: we should not like to commit him to any course beforehand, or to tie his hands!"

"But, quite apart from the great disadvantage of saddling that poor officer with such a difficult question at a time when he will have so much else to do, I do not think you understand that it will increase the hardships ten thousand-fold if the wretched people have to be turned out once the town is invested. It will then practically mean the death from starvation of them all, and be an atrocity. Now it is possible and involves comparatively little hardship. Why not tell the Public the truth and act? Lead them, don't follow. Of course, they will acquiesce, once they realise the position."

"Oh come, come," smiled the Minister, "isn't that a little strong? War is a brutal matter, but surely you don't imply that even were the place besieged the enemy would not allow the harmless civil population a safe-conduct through their lines? Why, they would all be non-combatants. You make our enemies out to be savages of the worst type. We live in different times from the siege of Jerusalem, you know! As to your last suggestion—why, it is not within the sphere of practical politics. Impossible—absolutely."

"I don't think you realise what War is. Starvation is one of the weapons of a besieger—as history has proved, one of the most powerful. If the opposing general conducting the siege should assist the defenders by allowing them to send out their women and children after the siege has commenced, he would be a traitor to his country and should be shot! From what I know of our enemy's notions of war and of the character of the man who will probably undertake any siege, I do not think this likely.

THE GREEN CURVE

Have you read his last work, ' Væ Victis ; or, The Ethics of War ' ? ”

“ No, I have not. I have no——”

“ You should. I will send you a copy. It has just been translated. It treats of starvation as a weapon, and deals with the problem of ' Les Bouches Inutiles.' ”

“ Thank you very much, but of course many men write things which they could not carry out in practice. I am afraid I should not be convinced by his theorising. Besides, if he is the ogre that you imagine, the commandant of the fortress will make his arrangements accordingly ! ”

“ Yes—when it will be too late ! ” The speaker lost his patience. “ So it is really the ' Public ' that you rely on to judge when such a thing is necessary ? The mob are the paid leaders and expert advisers of the nation ? I can't help telling you that the Government are shirking their duty, but are not evading their responsibility, by trying to shelve the questions for some luckless general to settle when it is too late. I trust you may not have the blood of many harmless non-combatants, or of the whole garrison, on your hands, or be responsible for eventual defeat.” He spoke bitterly.

“ Tut-tut, my *dear* General,” the Minister shrugged his shoulders in a deprecating way, “ it's absurd—quite impossible to talk like this. I am so much obliged—I'm sure we all are—for the trouble you have taken, but I do not think any useful purpose can be served by our continuing this discussion or attempting to reopen the matter. Your views have my fullest sympathy, I assure you : I will bear in mind what you have said. It shall not be lost sight of. Meanwhile let us hope for the best ! ” He smiled again, and his third chin nestled into his wide collar with an air of finality.

SOLDIERS' TALES

The hint was plain. With a curt farewell the other went out, sore at heart.

The Minister turned his chair round to his table and absently repeated the shibboleth—"We must hope for the best." But the catch-word did not seem to convey comfort, for the smile had left his lips. It was some time before the busy scratching of his pen showed that he had once again got back into his stride, and was making his point in a masterly minute.

II.

It was some weeks later : the storm had burst and the war had gone badly. Winter had fastened upon the coast fortress ; blizzard alternated with calm black frost ; but far more paralysing than the grip of winter was the gradual constriction of the enemy's line of investment, for by land and sea the town was cut off from the world.

Upon a certain wild afternoon the office of the Military Governor and Fortress Commander looked gloomy and deserted—silent but for the roaring of the fitful gusts in the chimney and the distant booming of artillery which could be heard at intervals. Suddenly these dull muffled sounds changed to a shrill discord of wind whistling through the windows, as the door was thrown open and two men entered. Before it could be closed a shower of papers fluttered from the table, and the powdery snow, which had been driven through the broken panes, scurried across the floor in wisps, turning to a dirty grey as it picked up the dust.

"That's the place," said the sergeant, as he pointed out a vacant space on the walls amidst the maps and proclamations with which they were covered, "made for it."

THE GREEN CURVE

The private, whose mouth seemed full, only nodded and drew a hammer from his belt. Uncoiling a large roll they had brought with them, which was apparently a patchwork of smaller pieces pasted together so as to form one sheet, they set to work. The sergeant whistled while he held it straight against the wall; the other, daintily drawing tin-tacks one by one from his mouth, nailed it up. After the last nail had been driven, and after a final stepping-back to judge of the general effect, the remaining tacks were carefully ejected into a scrap of paper. No one could have accused these two of not being whole-hearted in their work, for they took as much trouble over the exact position and alignment of this ugly diagram as a youth over his first white tie.

"Doesn't look so bad after all; but I'll just thicken up the green a bit, as I have it on me," said the senior, taking a chalk-pencil from behind his ear. "Yes, that does it. The Colonel said it was to be plain and prominently placed. It is plain, it is prominent and—it is neat. We've made a job of it." He sucked his pencil and cocked his head on one side critically.

The well-worn platitude that the main points—the great issues of affairs—are often lost sight of by those immersed in working out the details was well illustrated at this moment. These two men were intelligent and fully understood the meaning of the parti-coloured chart they had helped to prepare, and yet they were far more concerned with its exact position and appearance than they were with its meaning. Nevertheless, the message it conveyed was not altogether without importance to them personally.

The private solemnly screwed up the paper containing the tacks, put it in his pocket and stuck the hammer in his belt. He looked all round the room. "S'pose the

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Governor will be moving office again to-morrow. It's about time, as he's been here four days now ! ”

“ Yes ; it beats me how quick they find out where it is, after all the spies we've nobbled, and the flag kept flying at the wrong place too. Of course they know who keeps the show going and who is the whole defence—in a manner of speaking. Why, it would be worth anything to them to drop a shell on The Butcher. Not but what he hasn't had some narrow squeaks already. If it wasn't for this everlasting shifting it would be worth while tidying up this place a bit—something crool, I call it.” He glanced round and snorted, his draughtsman's eye offended at the state of the room. After picking up and weighting the scattered papers, they stumped heavily from the room, chased out by the jeering cat-calls of the wind. They stumped, inasmuch as they made a great noise on the hard parquet floor ; but it was more the shuffle of weak-kneed men who could not control their too heavy feet than the tramp of vigorous limbs. Perhaps it was due to the dull light of the leaden-hued sky, rendered gloomier by the dusty window, but both men certainly looked very ill. Their faces were haggard and grey, and their uniform sagged about their bodies.

The room itself, which had so excited the disgust of the sergeant, presented a combination of opulence and squalor that was bizarre to a degree. Large and high, its furnishing was mostly rough and its condition altogether neglected. The parquet floor was dull, except in a track to the door. The ceiling was hand-painted ; even in the dim light of this winter's afternoon could be seen the inevitable cupids wallowing among garlands of roses and ribbons upon a background of clouds. The remnants of Rose-du-Barri-coloured satin, which fluttered from the

THE GREEN CURVE

edges of the panels, showed what had been the wall covering—torn down to allow of the maps being nailed on the flat. Between the panels rococo metal sconces projected, and from the centre of the ceiling hung a florid electrolier in the same style. Most of the incandescent lamps were missing, and the blackened condition of those left told a tale of long use, while the candlesticks dotted about showed that no electric current was now available—searchlights devour so much !

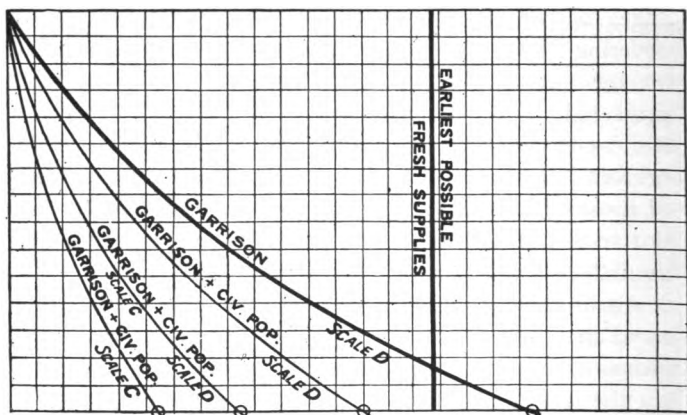
Again the grey scurry on the floor : an elderly man came in. As he stamped round the room, taking off his gloves and shaking the snow from him, his eye was arrested by the new diagram. Unhooking his fur coat, he walked up and began studying it carefully. In spite of the self-congratulations of its draughtsman, it was at first sight a confusing chart, and as the Governor frowned at it, the dour expression of his square face became accentuated almost to grotesqueness.

The heading, printed in bold type across the top of the paper, was—

FOOD CHART.

The sheet was ruled in horizontal and vertical lines, which formed a checkered pattern. The ends of the horizontal lines were figured as a scale of FOOD, those of the vertical as a scale of TIME. From the left-hand top corner started four thick lines of different colours, which ran downwards towards the right in sloping curves. These curves intersected the bottom of the 'zero' line of the food-scale at four different points, each marked with a circle.

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Beginning with the steepest, each curve was labelled as follows :—

<i>Red Curve.</i>	GARRISON. } CIV. POP. }	Scale C.
<i>Blue Curve.</i>	GARRISON. } CIV. POP. }	Scale C.
<i>Purple Curve.</i>	GARRISON. } CIV. POP. }	Scale D.
<i>Green Curve.</i>	GARRISON. }	Scale D.

Below was this explanatory note :—

Scale C. = Minimum Scale of Rations
for fighting or working.

Scale D. = Minimum Scale of Rations
for bare existence.

CIV. POP. = Civil Population (exclud-
ing those useful in defence, who
are shown as 'Garrison').

The Governor gazed steadily at the diagram for some minutes, tracing with his finger the different curves of

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the food-supply down to the point where the last ration would be eaten. He pulled a paper out of his pocket and, after a few pencilled calculations, commenced counting along the days in the time-scale, when his Chief-of-Staff, a slightly younger man, entered and saluted.

"Ah, there you are! I see you have been able to get this done at last. I am glad, because I got some news to-day which I think will make the point all the clearer—so clear that even the Council must grasp it at once. I now know the date before which we cannot possibly get any food ships through the blockade. Of course, they may not come till long after—if at all—but they cannot come before then. Just look at this, and chalk up and mark the diagram at the date." He turned to take off his fur coat and hang it over a chair.

The other took the paper, worked out a rapid sum and marked a certain date in the horizontal time-scale of the diagram. He looked round for a coloured chalk, but seeing none seized a quill pen from the table, and, dipping the plume into the red ink, drew a line up through the date—the wet feather leaving a brilliant smear of scarlet. "Label it," said the Governor, looking round.

With pain, for he was no draughtsman, the other printed against this line, "EARLIEST POSSIBLE FRESH SUPPLIES."

The Governor joined him. They both looked at the diagram, then at each other.

"Well, sir, that settles it definitely," said the staff-officer, and he whistled softly.

It did, indeed. The value of the chart was now increased tenfold, for it gave the absolute as well as the relative results of following the different curves. According to the Red Curve, the food would run out many weeks before the earliest possibility of relief; according to the

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Blue, the end would be closer to, but still before, the fateful day ; while, following the Purple, it would be only a few days short. The Green was the only curve that intersected the 'zero' line to the right of the scarlet smear. As the earliest date for this was not fixed, but problematical, it was obvious that the green curve was the only one that could be followed with safety, and, even then, not more than a few days' margin would be obtained. It was but too clear that only by refusing to feed the useless members of the population, or, in other words, by turning them out to freeze and starve, could the beleaguered town have a fair chance of holding out.

"I'd like a certain friend of ours to be here now and see this," continued the last speaker. It was unnecessary for him to utter any name or to specify him of the triple chin in order to be understood.

"Yes," quietly said the other, "I should like him to read his own death sentence in those curves!" There was no hint of jesting in this reply: the tone and expression of the speaker were grimness itself.

"Look here! I want some more explanation, as I prefer, if possible, to carry the Council with me, and they will want a lot. You see there has been no collusion, and the chart has not been faked to back up my views. The men who made it did not know of this last message ; but the result has borne out in a marvellous way what I have said all along."

"Very good, sir ; I will fetch the Director of Supplies, who got the actual calculations made out."

In a few moments he returned with that officer.

"Will you please explain how these figures have been arrived at?" said the Governor.

"The actual amounts of supplies, scales of rations, &c., I obtained from my returns, sir. The figures for the

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population I got from the Provost-Marshal. For the statistics, calculations and forecasts, I worked in conjunction with a committee of leading business men and some of the actuaries of the insurance companies. I got these gentlemen collected specially from the earthwork and other gangs. The principal actuary of the Peace and Plenty Assurance Company presided over the calculations. A lot of it was quite beyond me."

"I see. Now, what exactly do you include under 'Civil Population'? what we discussed the other day?"

"Yes."

"In fact—the useless mouths?"

"Precisely. Would you like to see the figures, sir? Here they are."

The elder man put out his hand, but hesitated, and did not take the proffered bundle. Instead he muttered half to himself—

"No, no; it is better I shouldn't. It must be decided on principle—on the diagram. I don't want to know the numbers—it might affect my decision. God knows it is hard enough to do my duty without knowing all the results in detail. No"—he finished out aloud—"I won't look at them! About the diagram, I don't see why the coloured lines should be curved. It seems that the decline for a uniform consumption should be a slanting line. Do you gradually decrease the ration scale?"

"No, sir, though the result is much the same. The curvature is caused by the decreasing daily consumption, owing to the increased proportion of deaths and——"

"Of course, yes; I had forgotten that for the moment. Did the civil experts collaborate cordially?"

"Very, especially the mathematicians. It was their own work they were coming back to—what they were bred up to do—and they enjoyed it after their long spell

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of navvy labour. They called it a 'pretty problem.' One poor fellow went quite off his head in his professional zeal, and lost all sense of proportion. He simply revelled in the curves! He said that the thing was capable of a 'neat solution,' for if we applied a suitably arranged sliding ration-scale to the casualty curve we should never eat our last ration!"

"What on earth did he mean?"

"I don't know, sir; but I took down what he said, as a matter of interest. He said—he said—here it is—that if we did this, the zero line of food would tend to become 'asymptotic' to the curves and——"

"What?"

"Asymptotic to the curves, and that if a fire at the dépôt should cause a sudden drop in the food-supply, we could almost turn this drop into a 'cusp' by making a sortie next day to bring up the casualties! He was also much grieved because, as we cannot put back the clock, we can never get a 'node' in the——"

"That's enough—that's enough. What did you do with him?"

"Sent him back to pick-and-shovel work at once; thought him quite mad; but the other actuaries now state that, mathematically, he was correct, though it was of no practical value! The commercial men did not see the force of losing combatants simply to produce a 'cusp,' and said it was not business."

"Well, well, many more will go like that before we've done, I expect. Anything more I should know about the working out before the Council meets?"

"Yes, I forgot to mention that certain events are expressly excluded from this prognostication—earth-quakes, large assaults, or fire in supply dépôts; also, we have estimated every edible in the food total."

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"Thanks. It's all only too clear," said the Governor. Then turning to his Chief-of-Staff, he added: "Please have draft orders got out in detail for carrying on according to the green curve, from the day after to-morrow. I have decided finally, and shall force it through the Council of Defence now, by the aid of that diagram. Let me see the orders after the Council meeting. We meet in an hour, and until then I want to be undisturbed. Tell the A.D.C. I do not wish to see anyone upon any subject not vital."

"Very good, sir."

The wind whistled, and the Governor was alone.

III.

He pushed one of the gilt chairs covered with stained brocade up to the stove and sat heavily down. The winter's day had drawn to its close, and in the fitful light of the candles, towards which his face was turned, the deep-set eyes, square chin and bristly moustache gave an impression of the man's nature. His face was almost brutal in its severity, though it was not on account of his appearance that he had been dubbed The Butcher. From the dark and frayed strip of silk on his breast, it was evident that he was much decorated: could the colours of the ribbons have been distinguished, it would also have been clear that he had seen much service.

Dogged to obstinacy, he was not cursed with too much imagination, and he pursued to the bitter end what he thought to be the path of duty, regardless of side-issues. Formed of tougher material than the majority of his fellow-countrymen, he played the bloody game of war with a stern logic, untouched by the opportunism and hysterical humanitarianism that were helping to sap the vitality of his country. He was, therefore, popularly

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but quite erroneously, supposed to be careless of human life. Being matter-of-fact, he realised that success in war is as important to-day as ever it was, for defeat means economical if not physical death to the conquered. He could appreciate the meaning of that expression 'saigner à blanc'; moreover, he knew how eminently ripe for such an operation was his own nation—grown rich and soft through years of peace and money-making. Expecting no misplaced mercy from his enemy, he never accorded it himself. To this trait and to the fact that, with a true sense of proportion, he had not hesitated upon one occasion to sacrifice a large number of his own men in order to gain more than a compensating advantage elsewhere, he owed his nickname. Given at first in execration by the hasty and ignorant, it had grown to be a name, if not of affection, at least of confidence. To the soldiers under him it was almost a term of endearment.

Painfully taking off his stiffened gaiters and boots he placed his aching feet upon the guard-rail of the stove and took a tobacco-pouch from his pocket. As he withdrew the pouch, a dog's-eared photograph fell out. For a minute he gazed sadly at it before picking it up. It was the portrait of a lady and a child, and as The Butcher gazed, his nickname seemed a libel.

Sombre indeed were his thoughts, for never perhaps since the Middle Ages, when life was cheap, had unhappy soldier to face such a problem. It had haunted him ever since he had been driven into this coast town with his field army and had taken command of the fortress. Finding the whole population in the place without adequate food, he had foreseen what must happen. Now it had come to the point. The diagram had made matters so mathematically clear that the facts had to be faced. His own mind had long since been made up; but now the Council

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of Defence must see the inevitable course. It needed no highly-coloured imagination to realise what the green curve meant to those evicted in such weather, and The Butcher was certainly under no delusions. It meant death from exposure and starvation to hundreds of his own race—men, women and little ones. This was different from losing soldiers in action, or even shooting down the populace in a food riot. Not responsible for it, he as much as possible kept his thoughts from the man who had placed him in this position. His course of action determined on, he tried not to dwell on the horrors of the inevitable; but, when alone, his mind reverted to the subject. He sat on, wearied, wrestling with his dreadful thoughts, his rough features lit up in the semi-gloom by the glow from his pipe. Do what he would, he could not blot out from his sight the starving crowd, wandering blindly in the snow between the hostile armies; and the group on the photograph kept intruding itself on the scene! As to the chance of the besiegers receiving the refugees or giving them passage, it never entered his head. He knew War, and he knew his enemy.

Suddenly, a more dreadful possibility, suggested to him by someone more imaginative, recurred to him with insistence. Even when at length his eyes closed, his pipe went out and his head drooped forward, it continued to occupy his dreams.

He was in one of the advanced works of the girdle of forts—where he had spent the previous night—standing alone in the snow. Close in front was a searchlight, whose beam slowly swept to and fro across the landscape. Not far off, to one side and well clear of the beam, was its observer. Though no snow was falling, the bitter wind now and then whirled up little clouds of it from the ground, which, as they eddied through the ray of light,

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flashed out like dazzling swarms of fire-flies dancing past. He was close enough to hear the ' phit-phit ' which ended the wild career of those flakes which chanced to encounter the metal projector, heated by the electric arc spluttering within. Between the gusts the air cleared, and he caught a glimpse over the undulating country towards the enemy's lines, a long distance off. From this stretch of country all vegetation had been cleared, but its billowy nature still provided shelter unsearched by the light, where masses might collect unseen. Close in front he saw the inner wire-entanglement standing out black and cruel against the snow, and farther out the repetition of this pitiless web of barbed wire—a continuous grey band.

The enemy seemed to him to be inactive. A strange quiet reigned over their lines, and between the howling gusts the silence was only broken by the hiss of the carbons, the distant bark of an oil-engine and the noise of sleeping men as they snored and muttered. Just behind the parapet lay the line of figures wrapped in blankets and skins. They were, except the look-outs, indeed asleep in spite of the continual rustling and coughing. Now and again there were snatches of incoherent babble, and even of laughter, but no notice was taken by their companions or by the few officers and non-commissioned officers pacing up and down close to him. After each gust gigantic shadows danced over the country as the collected snow was rubbed off the lenses by a gloved hand ; occasionally the light was altogether cut off for a period. He stood watching. Everything seemed going well.

A bell rang under the light emplacement, and the recumbent telephone operator swore deeply as he got up with his blankets clinging to him and placed the cold instrument to his tingling ear. It was a message from someone at the next fort, who imagined that he saw some-

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thing. The ray from their light could be seen fixed steadily towards the North-West. An officer came to the instrument, and a brief conversation ensued over the wire. A gong sounded, and with a clicking noise the needle of a dial close to the telephone jerked to a certain bearing. The searchlight above quietly swung to the desired direction, while the officer joined the observer.

The Butcher followed. There, right away among the ghostly sand-dunes, now that the converging rays of light were focussed on the spot, something could be distinguished in the concentrated rays. Something moving—a dark body—a mass against the snow. He could only come to one conclusion—it was the enemy advancing to an assault—madness on their part unless they succeeded in effecting a surprise. The officer looked long, then placing a whistle between his lips, blew. This signal was taken up and repeated on all sides till the air was full of shrill sound. The observers continued to watch. The whole place became alive, though there was no shouting, no real noise ; but despite the efforts to preserve silence, the click of opening magazine cut-offs and the metallic rattle of cartridge-clips were unmistakable.

The Butcher tried to estimate the direction and rate of advance, and after a short pause, evidently for the same purpose, the observing officer whistled again twice. The light was turned off, and the ray from the other fort also disappeared. For a few minutes the quiet bustle continued as guns were unhooded and trained, and piles of ammunition uncovered. The hot-water bags, which had been nestling against the water-jackets of the machine-guns, were thrown aside. Two or three baby searchlights were now got ready, each in its own little emplacement. They could throw a dispersed beam for a comparatively short range over a wide area—just what was required for

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the coming slaughter. The long-range concentrated beam had served to pick up the quarry far away ; but when it came to the ' kill ' the whole front would be flooded with the glare from those baby lights, the special *rôle* of which it was to dazzle the sheep and light up the shambles. The electric circuits to the mines among the entanglements were again tested, the connections made to the firing-keys by which these volcanoes would be made to erupt.

Here and there a man took off his glove and sucked his trigger-finger to get the numbness out, for the cold metal seared as if already hot. The great light deceptively shone forth again once or twice, and glared everywhere but in the right direction, for there was no heed to impress overmuch on the enemy, now marching to his doom across the snow, that they had been seen.

Silently in the dark and the stabbing cold The Butcher waited : he was pleased—not that he gloated over the coming slaughter, but his soldier's instinct could not but be soothed by the impending success and by the way things had been done. His ideas had been carried out to the letter, and not a soul had asked either advice or orders. All had known their duty, all had done it. There had been no hesitation, no useless gun-fire at uncertain ranges : once discovered, the enemy had been as far as possible lured on to certain destruction. When their silent masses should reach the flat beyond the outer obstacle, the defences dark and noiseless in front of them, their hopes would rise high ; but when, checked by the entanglement and struggling in the maze of barbed wire, a flood of light from those earthworks suddenly blinded and threw them into a blaze of glare—— ! To pursue the matter further was too much even for *him*—and what good ? These things had to be.

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Whilst allowing his thoughts to run ahead, he had stood calm, but elsewhere the tension had now become extreme. Only one finger trembling over-hard against a trigger and the whole plan would be given away—the victims warned. It was a moment when a man—well-meaning but of untrained nerve—might spoil the greatest *coup*.

It was strange, indeed, but no such hail of shrapnel was falling on these works as might have been expected with an assault so close. Nor was there the usual amount of firing from the enemy's lines : what there was seemed to be directed elsewhere. The hum of rifle-bullets even was absent. The enemy must indeed be mad ! To assault from such a distance, and to neglect to assist this assault in forcing by their gun-fire the defenders to keep under cover ! Of course it was to help towards a surprise ; but he wondered.

There was now a general rustling among the men. Though seeing nothing, all had an undefinable feeling that the moment was close, very close. He himself was infected by the contagion—his pulse quickened. Suddenly his heart almost stopped as the true reason for the absence of the enemy's fire struck him dizzy. Those silently advancing masses were not the enemy. Great God ! He knew now ! They were the Useless Mouths that had been thrust out. The picture of the wanderers in the snow again came before him. He could see them, and among them he could distinguish—— !

He tried to shout—to warn the waiting garrison not to open fire—that it was not the enemy ; but horror had frozen his voice, which rattled in his throat. He tore open his collar, shouted again, but not a soul heard or even looked up. He tried to run forward to touch them—to shake them ; he could not move—his feet were frozen so hard to the ground that the effort was agony. While

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he struggled he heard the snick of the breech-blocks. Grip tightened on rifle and machine-gun handles were clutched.

As he made one more frantic effort to shout, a rocket shot up in the distance, leaving behind it a parabolic green trail in the sky. There was one loud report and a flash——!

.....
He awoke.

That he had knocked over a candle in his struggles or that his feet were scorching, he did not notice, for he was in a cold sweat, dazed and trembling.

The dread dream still held him. As he gazed vaguely round, in the gloom he saw the diagram, and the hateful green curve—that curve which marked out so clearly where duty lay—caught his eye and brought him back to the facts. Getting up, he looked at his watch, then stamped up and down in his stockinged feet oblivious of snow, dust or nails. A great struggle was going on within him—a struggle between conscience and sentiment. Every time he faced the chart and saw that curve, the cause of duty received an impulse. Every time he turned away the dream again possessed him, and a feeling of humanity prevailed. He tried to reason. He tried to persuade himself that his fears were groundless, that no such horror could occur, for all would be warned when the wretched souls were turned out. But he knew too well that on a dark night anything may happen; so he anew tried to persuade himself that to be shot, even by their own kith and kin, was after all a more speedy, a more merciful end, than to be frozen. His efforts were all in vain.

He walked to the door, opened it, stopped in hesitation, and then came back to his chair, leaving the door ajar. Once again the shrilling of the wind and the fluttering of

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the papers on the wall filled the air. There was a tearing sound, and alas for the sergeant's handiwork ! one corner of the diagram tore off its nail and hung flapping to and fro. The green curve was hidden. One influence on the side of duty was gone.

He looked up. Though not superstitious, he muttered—" So be it ! "

His mind once again made up, his expression relaxed. He rang. The Chief-of-Staff entered, a paper in his hand, much surprised to find the Governor sitting with boots and gaiters off in that icy draught.

" I have changed my mind. Have you made out the orders I told you ? "

" Yes, sir ; here they are. "

The Governor took the paper and, to the astonishment of his junior, tore it in small pieces.

" I now want you to make out draft orders according to the purple curve over there, and let me see them. "

" But, sir, you remember what that means ? " said the staff-officer. " Surely—— "

" Yes. I remember. I have made up my mind not to turn them out, and to take the chance. I know what you wish to say—that the food won't last. I have thought of that—I'll risk it. We must take risks sometimes. Now I'm due to meet the Council ; but my task will be easier than I thought. "

He started up and would have left the room bootless as he was, had not the Chief-of-Staff pointed out his condition.

" By the way, please have that diagram taken down : I shall not want it any longer. If you need to refer to it for orders, destroy it afterwards. "

His bewildered subordinate stood speechless. He noticed, as his chief left the room, that the tough man appeared at last to be aging. He walked almost feebly.

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IV.

The Dives Restaurant was well filled.

The bald-headed man, with the gold glasses and the pendulous lower lip, finished his peach with gusto and beckoned to one of the polyglot waiters hovering about the special party in this hotel—one of the fashionable rendezvous of the capital. It was a man's dinner, but the private room in which the diners were seated opened out into the large restaurant, filled, in spite of bad times, by a crowd of men and women seated at small tables. The crowd was what is termed 'Smart,' inasmuch as all were clean, richly dressed and of outwardly unimpeachable solvency; many, too, were distinguished, or, at least, sufficiently well known for their presence to be noted next day in the society column of the papers. The large room presented a brilliant and gay scene, and the style of the whole hotel expressed that note of luxury demanded by the Sybarites of every capital from the resorts which aim at being the vogue. To the lucky mortals able to pay for its hospitality, the winds were indeed tempered, and all the senses were lulled by the atmosphere of protection and refined luxury. The carefully regulated temperature, though now perhaps a trifle oppressive after the long meal, gave no hint of the winter outside, for no draught could penetrate the revolving doors and double windows. The eye, while pleased by the subtle colour scheme of the decorations and the bright dresses, was undazzled by any direct rays of crude light, for the electric lamps were placed behind a cornice, and the rooms were illumined only by diffused radiance and by the soft glow of the table lamps in their pink silk shades. The steps of the busy waiters made no sound on the thick carpet; even

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the sensuous music of the string orchestra was modulated by the discreet distance at which the performers were situated. The babble in the restaurant rose in waves of sound which, however, were never so loud as to hinder the conversation in the private rooms.

A casual glance this winter night at the gay scene in the Dives or in any similar pleasure resorts of the capital would scarcely have given the impression that war had been raging for some months, or that it had been on the whole unsuccessful. 'The Front' was far away, and though many people were mourning, and more were inclined to be pessimistic, the life of the capital continued on the surface much as it had done during peace: people were born, were married, died, business was carried on as far as the general depression permitted. The froth of the population especially still insisted on having its excitements. But the real state of the public mind could have been gauged as much from the way that any trifling success was received as from the savage and ignorant criticism hurled at the army and its generals for every set-back.

The full-lipped man having carefully selected another peach, proceeded to peel it with that strict attention to business which had made him what he was. Conversation had flagged during this dinner, notwithstanding the flushed look on some of the faces. The one topic in the minds of all had been tacitly shunned, with the result that was to be expected from such continuous effort at repression. All round the same effect was noticeable. There was an additional reason for any lack of sparkle at this special party, for the intended guest of the evening—the Minister with the triple chin—had, at the last moment, been prevented by pressure of weighty affairs from attending. His absence was not entirely unexpected,

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and surmises as to its cause had been avoided until the moment of mental and physical relaxation which arrives with coffee and cigars.

"Of course it must be more bad news," said one gloomily, as he swung his chair round. "We have got nothing else for some time. If it had been good the Government would have made the most of it, and would have published it this morning. I suppose it is unavoidable, but I wish we had more details. For instance, I don't like the lack of news about The Butcher at all. The reports are much too vaguely rosy: when it comes to analysing the basis for the official optimism, we find precious little. I don't like it a bit. If only our guest had come, we might have got some pronouncement from him: there's a man for you!"

There was a chorus of assent and then a pause. The bald gentleman, who had just finished his second peach, deliberately dipped his plump fingers into the scented water of his finger-bowl, removed the gilded band of his cigar, cut it with the same care that he had bestowed on peach-peeling, and lovingly licked the end. When it was alight, he looked at the glowing point to make certain it was burning evenly, wiped his glasses, then spoke in a voice of husky satisfaction which proclaimed he had at last dined, and was for the time beyond the reach of fate.

"Yes—he is a man; but careful, prudent, far-seeing and square, and therefore we should have got nothing from him unless there were definite good news. But anyway, I have great faith in The Butcher: he makes War with a capital W, and does not play at it. He won't surrender."

"Why, do you know anything?" was the question snapped out from two or three directions: the speaker was the sort of magnate that gets news early.

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"No, I know no more than you do—no more than is public ; but I use my brains and make deductions."

"It's an absolute shame that they do not give us more information," interrupted another angrily. "Here we are, paying for this infernal war, and treated like children, getting nothing but the veriest flapdoodle served out to us. I think censorship is all right in reason ; but there are limits. Do they think we can't stand bad news ? "

"No," went on the man opposite, "but officialdom likes keeping the public in ignorance, for then it obtains a sense of superiority. Of course the ostensible reason of this secrecy is that the enemy should not be helped by information, which is all right as far as it goes, but my idea is that they keep things secret long after the necessity has passed. It's quite sound keeping intentions dark, but the enemy know of past events as soon as we do. No, no," he continued mysteriously, "there's more in it than that. They're hiding something—want to screen somebody—or they're rigging a bit. Take this siege ; why, we know nothing of what has really happened. Everyone seems content to have confidence in The Butcher ! They say he's the right man in the right place, and use other catch-phrases, but facts are what we want. The individual is not everything."

"There you are wrong " interposed the man with the glasses ; "that's just what does count. It's the individual—the personality—that counts. I take an altogether personal view of the matter, and if anyone else but The Butcher were in command, I should have sold. As it is, I am a Bull. Can I say more ? He is the best man we have. As I've often said, our army is too luxurious—wants too much—our soldiers are too soft ; but not The Butcher. We need hardy men, and I think he is about the only one. Give me hardy soldiers, I say."

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With that he shivered slightly, and an attentive waiter at once went up and closed one of the doors.

"He is certainly the strongest man we have," added another. "If they had followed his advice all along we should have done much better, but he has been hampered as usual by the statesmen—I mean politicians. Of course I don't *know*, but I believe many of his recommendations haven't been accepted. Anyhow, it's no good moping over possibilities. There may be no bad news. Why anticipate?"

"Quite, why anticipate?" echoed his neighbour—a fair specimen of the gilded youth of the nation, who had hitherto been chiefly noticeable for his bored look. This tired young man wore his hair long: it was dark, glossy hair, brushed straight from his sloping forehead. The receding chin and two prominent teeth seen in profile suggested a rodent; the oily hair well plastered down further suggested a rodent which had eaten its way through a keg of butter. "Why anticipate? I say," he repeated, well pleased with his contribution. "Eh, what?" and replaced an exaggerated cigarette-holder between his lips.

After this there was a pause, perhaps quite naturally, in the conversation, and the whole party listened to the wild music of the reputed Tziganes, who were again playing. It was a lament, the sad refrain being taken up in the bass. As the last low wailing notes of the violoncello died away through the rooms the hush became general. The vibrations of the strings had awakened too many memories for conversation—faces had grown sad.

The long silence following the music was harshly broken by a distant baying noise from the street, which grew louder as it was repeated at rapid intervals. The current of reverie was interrupted, and there was a universal movement to give orders to the waiters, for this sound

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—the cry of newsvendors selling special war editions—had become familiar to all. It was impossible to distinguish what was being shouted in hoarse tones, and the papers were awaited with impatience: all pretence at indifference was cast aside.

Returning with the others, one waiter rushed into the private room with three or four papers, which were torn from his grasp. The man with the glasses, being near the door, got the first copy. He read the scare heading—all there was—out loud, in a horror-struck wheeze—

“UNSUCCESSFUL SORTIE. GOVERNOR WOUNDED. STARVED FORTRESS SURRENDERS!!” Quite softly he wheezed again to himself—“Fortress surrenders!” Then, dropping his cigar, he sank into his chair and added, “And I have been buying! BUYING!”

The rooms were now filled with exclamations, shouts and even oaths; many were cursing The Butcher, few were taking his part. The band struck up the opening bars of the latest exotic dance, but was shouted into silence, and the dejected revellers began to disperse.

The man with the glasses sat on, fingering his glass of *crème de menthe*. Again he panted, “If it had been any other I should not have backed him. Ah!—damn him, damn him! Traitor! I wonder where he failed?”

Tremulously raising his glass, he drained the warming cordial. As it flowed, a film of the sticky liqueur clung to the curve of the glass, and, catching the light, gleamed momentarily emerald.

That night The Butcher lay dying in the enemy's hands—his last moments embittered by the idea that he had betrayed his country.

That night also—in the capital—a certain politician lay sleepless. Perhaps he, too, may have thought——?

III.

PATRICK BRADE, MURDERER.

WATCHMAN ! What of the night ? A restless night, with gusts of wind booming up from nowhere so suddenly and so briefly that it seems as if a great cathedral door were opening intermittently and letting the gale rush in amongst the craggy naves and aisles of the kopjes. Clang ! the door is to again ; a million little echoes remaining behind in the suddenly restored quiet whinny faintly up amongst the pinnacles and rustle over the floors. Never still, this night, though between the blasts the heart of all the Universe seems to have stopped beating, so utter is the hush. But the flattened grass and the strained mimosa bough straighten themselves again with a subdued crackle, far down in the valley the sound of the swollen spruit growls up once more like the roll of a distant train, and ahead, deep in the very bosom of the night, fifty leagues of grass, a hundred hills, a thousand kloofs, all Africa, seems to be settling down to rest again, with countless hummings eddying in the wake of that last rush of wind. An unhappy thing is Night, the tragedy of the drama of Nature. Has anyone ever beheld it coming on without sadness, or awaked in the midst of it without alarm ? Every man at some time has had his soul buried in Night for a moment, maybe on a ship at sea, or down in a wooded valley, or even in the city, and when he has dug it up again has

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found it lapped in something very much more like horror than Peace.

On this particular gusty night ten thousand men, nearly all asleep, a few dead, lay in open order, sprinkled out at regular intervals along the ridge of a mountain. Both dead and alive, sleeping and waking, lay as still as a row of corbels along a Gothic parapet, and almost as grotesque, for both the sleeps of civilised men are particularly hideous in face and attitude. Did Homer's sightless eyes close in slumber with that imbecile droop at the angles ; and slaughtered Hector, did he drop with the leer and contortion of a clown at the circus ? So these ten thousand slept and grew cold amongst the stones, the aerial shouting and the sudden stabs of calm equally unnoticed. The dead stiffened like drying plaster, each in the pose in which he had been struck down. The living were scarcely more motionless ; only their flesh crept and shuddered at the sticky touch of damp underclothing, of steaming boots and socks, things which take the courage from a man more surely than the bursting of a shell. Besides each lay a rifle so rusty that it looked fitter for the scrap-heap of a marine store dealer than the field of battle. For this was a battle in the New Style, and these ten thousand unclean sleepers were fighting as certainly as if they had been swinging the bayonet and blaspheming body to body with the enemy, instead of snoring and sighing five hundred black yards away from him down below the ridge line. It was a battle, and not a first-nighter either. Five days ago there had been a march from a sunny mimosa-scented camp somewhere in the Elysian Fields—a march so sudden that the officers ran to parade with their breast-pockets bulging with the letters of the just arrived mail, and read them with bent heads when the march began, stumbling out of step at the heads of

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their companies, to the extreme annoyance of the leading sections of fours, the men of which winked at each other when the Captain grew so dreamy over a certain fat manuscript, filling many leaflets of pale blue linen paper—so dreamy that he held an unlighted match to an unfilled pipe, and thereafter smoked nothing for an hour as he strode along.

But soon dreams and winking alike had fled, with all other pleasant things, from the line of march. Heat and dust came instead, and the agonies of fatigue and thirst, the torment of heavy straps and buckles grating, grating, grating interminably against the same sore inches of flesh, the blow of hard boots against the same aching toe, the pressure of the helmet upon the same throbbing spot on the temples. The sun rose higher and hotter, piercing like a fiery sword the fog of dust which enveloped the column. The maize crackled like green flames on either side of the track; the open veld beyond glared fiercely, burning through the rough boots as if it hid a furnace; the dry river-beds sent up eddies of scorching sand, though there was no wind, and the dancing whorls seemed to contain their own motive power; the tops of the kopjes stared pitilessly out over the burning air, which, shimmering up from the kloofs below, made their granite bulk tremble like shaken gauze. It had been a long and evil march, which had dragged the army, sick with exhaustion, to the under-features of the mountains which, seen from the camping-ground, had seemed so smoothly blue and sheer. Here they were, close ahead, not blue any more, but brown and scarred; no longer sheer, but leaning in terraces back from the muddle of forested hillocks which tossed about their feet. It was amongst this tumble of trees and gullies that the cavalry advance-guard had first run into the enemy, when the infantry was still some

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miles behind. Starting with a sort of firework splutter from here, there, anywhere, out of the jungle, the shooting had gradually developed into a steady tattoo, swelling as it receded before the persistent skirmishing of the now dismounted troopers, until a formidable unison, rolling across three miles of front, disclosed the first tier of a hostile position which stepped, in a series of shelves, up to the crest-line showing black and ragged against the steel-blue sky. As evening fell, and the firing, dying with the light, began to dance in runnels of red sparks from the mountain shadows, the army shook itself out into battle formation across the heated plain below. A weary job this, after a long march, imposing more stumbling miles on the troops who had to form the extended flanks. Night was far spent when the last of them, struggling over dark and broken country, had reached their positions. Drenched with sweat, throbbing with fatigue and faint with hunger, the silent men flung themselves down with a clatter, the majority too weary even to lighten their haversacks of the bread and beef which, wrapped in dirty paper, had joggled all day, in tune with their steps, amongst pipes, tobacco, rags, spare socks and old letters, the precious uncleanly litter which takes the place of *home* with soldiers in the field. Then a few short hours of silence, in which the sweat cooled to a bitter chill, the boots hardened on the blistered feet, and every little fold of clothing became a ragged file. For all the stillness there is little sleep in a bivouac under arms after the first hour or so. One by one the men are awakened by the cold, and though they lie as motionless as before, many wide, troubled eyes, like those of a suffering animal, will look into yours should you steal down the prone ranks by the light of the moon or lantern. It is a relief when, an hour before dawn, there is a general rousing, though it is an oppressed and

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furtive return to life, that of an army which has not slept well in the presence of the enemy. There is a strict order abroad—'No noise'—but it is unnecessary. Few wish to talk; there is a little quiet munching of the bread and beef, a little stir and stumbling as the 'orderly men' return, each festooned with a score of his comrades' water-bottles which he has filled at a neighbouring trickle, a little more stir as the soldiers fall in; a subdued 'numbering off,' raised a semitone here and there by the blunderings of the inevitable softy whom half a century of campaigning would never teach his place in the ranks or his number when he gets there. Just as dawn breaks in a slit of peacock-blue over the black ridges ahead, the army is ready for battle, and the battle begins. It begins with a scattered, crackling advance through the tangled under-features below the mountain, through which the men fight their way like beaters in a pheasant cover, bursting through the thickets, whipped by twigs and torn by thorns, falling into ditches and hollows, clambering up sudden hillocks and brambly banks, bumping into trees, sometimes actually held immovable, in spite of their struggles, in the grip of a knot of creepers, whilst leaves and twigs spin and whistle, and trunks and branches thud and drum at the lashing blows of a sleet of bullets falling steeply. Some invisible field-guns open rapidly upon the brakes, the trees strip under the shrapnel as if shredded by fire, hurricanes seem to whirl their woody fragments into the quiet air, whilst blazing fireballs in the shape of 'common shell' pounce screaming into the bushes and rend them with a thousand red-hot splinters. Not many men are hit, for the attack is as invisible as the defence, but those who are struck fall unhappily enough, headlong into brambly holes, or hanging like drying clothes over bushes too stiff to let them through. It is impossible to see more

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than a yard or two on either side, and it can only be conjectured who has just howled like a whipped dog somewhere on the right of the company, or who it is has been left, sobbing and retching, in a little overgrown pit behind the centre. The stretcher-bearers, blundering along in rear, listen intently for such sounds amidst the uproar, and often circle laboriously more than once around the lair of a sufferer before they find him, or what is left of him. They have many strange experiences, these *chiffoniers* of the field. One pair, stooping to lift a crumpled figure, find themselves suddenly attacked with demoniac strength and ferocity by a creature with nothing human about it but its clothes, a creature which after a short and brutal struggle with its benefactors falls headlong to the ground again and with a long howl, dies.¹ Another couple, who are just bringing their burden into the field hospital, grumble audibly at the waste of their long and dangerous tramp from the front, when a spent bullet, dropping perpendicularly from a great height, perforates the exact centre of their patient's forehead with no more sound than a pencil thrust into bread.¹

Meanwhile the enemy having yielded up, as he had always intended, the skirts of his position, or 'line of observation,' has coagulated on the real crest, or 'line of resistance,' and will budge no farther. It is curious to watch the invariable effect of this in a widespread battle. Advancing against a retreating foe, when prolonged over many hours, becomes so much a habit that only the most terrible challenge will often bring the attacking force to the halt; and this not from enthusiasm, for there is mighty little of that in the presence of the small-bore bullet, but from the carelessness or callousness induced by fatigue. The consequence is that from out of a line of

¹ A fact.

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attack, 'brought to' and thickening before a standing enemy, there are sure to be a number of disconnected and spasmodic little rushes forward, made usually by fresh arrivals, which in a few moments may easily double the casualties of the day. In fact, a general in such a position, with whom all has hitherto been going well, will do well to prepare his soul for one or two little tragedies towards evening, such as a company or two cut up or 'missing,' or a battalion getting itself into such a fix that, there being such things as evening papers, the whole of his tactics for to-morrow must be altered to rescue the cast-aways. Such incidents had not been wanting in the action sketched above. There was scarcely a regiment but had quite a number of men and officers unaccountably absentee, supposed to have gone forward in the gathering darkness, but not unaccountably invisible to the patrols which could only crawl a little ahead flat on their stomachs, in extreme danger from the rifles of both sides. Such meagre reports as came in were very little comforting. "'Ave found Lootenant Smith, sir ; I knowd 'im by 'is ring."—" Beg pardon, sir, the 'ole of my section, sir, is lyin', most of 'em wounded, close up agin' the enemy's trench ; they wants to know what is the orders, sir." Even when the main body sinks to silence for the night, shoulder to shoulder on the bare ground, there is quite a bustle out in the gloom in front of them. Single shots, single bursts of shots, faint calls, the clink and sparks of boots on stones, the rustle of creeping forms, the yellow wink of a match lighted and instantly extinguished, every now and then, one would swear it, a sob, once and again a shriek ; occasionally, too, a general alarm, caused by the stumble of a sentry, by the startled shout of a dreaming soldier, by the blundering appearance of a knot of stragglers, by nothing at all. Once there is a

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regular turmoil, which only just stops short of a panic. Down the slope, amongst the silent bivouacs of the supports and reserves, a span of sixteen oxen, their drivers either killed or bolted, have been standing harnessed to their waggon for hours, pathetic, patient and motionless, as is their wont, but with terror slowly mantling to a whirlwind in their dull heads. Suddenly they give way ; without a sign of warning, as if lashed by a single fierce whip-stroke, the great team bounds forward in unison, and with a roar of fear thunders away over the acres of sleeping men, the ponderous waggon bounding behind, splintering against every boulder, and flinging on every side fragments of itself and its load. Scarcely less in unison the startled troops leap to their feet, many still asleep as they spring. There are shouts of " the enemy ! " Piercing yells arise from some who are run over ; others, rushing as they think from the track of the peril, either rush into it or spread confusion amongst their comrades. For twenty minutes the whole valley seethes with disorder, during which the troops of the front line lie apprehensively to their arms, fearing that they are surrounded ; whilst the offending waggon, hurling itself at length into a water-course, comes to rest in a hideous welter of splinters and mangled beasts.¹

All the above narration, so large a slice of a ' short story,' would be very bad art had it, as it would seem, nothing to do with Patrick Brade. But as a matter of fact it had much to do with that private soldier of the West Mayo Regiment, for, as with the stampeding oxen, these events were rapidly producing a crisis in his soul.

The West Mayos, a battalion composed almost entirely of excitable youngsters driven from their native bogs by want and what they deemed oppression, shared in double

¹ This incident is a fact.

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measure every ill, as they would have similarly magnified every success, of the force of which they were a unit. And there was, as has been seen, much ill. The nerves and bodies, even of the imperturbable south British regiments, the Warrshires and the Royal Arables, for instance, were at the verge of endurance. Apart from the discomforts, the alarms and excursions, there was a feeling abroad that the 'show was being badly run,' and this is even more depressing than fear or starvation to soldiers who have almost to a man passed the Fifth Standard of the State Schools. Another warning, therefore, to the General Officer of to-day. Let him remember that his men are *thinking*, half-bakedly thinking, scrutinising him and his operations by the dim light of primary education, weighing their own chances in the wavering balance of each moment, and casting up their own value by the faked assessment of their local Cleon. Let him therefore be very wary of his troops, not in the heat of the fight—for there, please the Lord, the smeary veneer will melt and vanish as of yore, revealing the man beneath—but in the exhausting intervals between fights, when efficiency burns low, and there is time for what in the rank-and-file of humanity passes for 'thought.' Here was such an occasion, and the West Mayos, as has been said, from constitutional causes, were in rather worse mental fettle than any other corps, the dullest of which lay somewhat desponding and distrustful along the windy ridges. And by far the unhappiest man in the West Mayo was this same Patrick Brade. Naturally of fierce and gloomy temper, a Kelt ruined by generations of intemperance, suffering and political anger amounting almost to madness, he had at this juncture additional reason for being at his worst. Secretly sympathising with the enemy because they were the enemy, he hated the war ;

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he hated the discipline, the enforced obedience to orders which brought but danger and discomfort to himself—in short, there was nothing connected with military service which he did not hate. But most of all he hated his own Captain, one Maguire of Ballaclanish, and this for a variety of reasons. In the first place, Maguire was the son of the agent to whom Brade's family had for forty years owed their agrarian grudges, until a bullet from behind a wall had laid the stern old man low. The boy Maguire had been his father's usual companion on his rides and drives about the wild west Irish estate, the spectator, and, in the eyes of the peasantry, part author by inheritance, of their woes. But apart from this, Maguire was undoubtedly a bad officer. Of ungovernable temper, ill brought up and unversed in the restraints of a gentleman, in barracks he harassed his men with nagging, in the field confused them by Bull of Bashan orders, and angered them by vituperations addressed by name, than which private soldiers hold no insult more grievous. And none had been more often the target of the officer's bolts than Brade, whose natural stupidity conspiring with his lack of zeal led him invariably to misinterpret orders which were, in truth, usually delivered by Maguire under the common delusion that plans so clear to himself, their deviser, must be patent to all who had to carry them out. Brade, in fact, had become his Captain's butt, and thence, by a process of devolution frequent enough in such cases, the butt of anyone who desired to rid himself safely of either a joke or a curse. For the man was no hero. Bodies created in an orgy of overproof spirits, and thereafter nurtured mainly on inferior potatoes, are not the chosen dwelling-places of valour. And a bully or a practical joker was all the safer with Brade, because the latter had long since come to assign every insult or act of oppression not to its immediate

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or momentary author, but to Maguire. Gradually, in fact, the thought had shaped itself in Brade's mind that were his captain to be cut off, the troubles of which he was the root would necessarily vanish with him. This idea had existed only in general form as a consummation ardently to be desired, until on this very day the Devil, keen watcher for the souls of men, had shot a startling hint which in an instant found its mark. It had happened that during the skirmishing a rifle accidentally let off by a stumbling soldier had sent a bullet screaming close past the cheek of Maguire, who was leading—so close that it stroked the soft flesh like a feather as it passed. The incident had been observed but by three persons—by the horror-struck offender himself, of course by Maguire, whose volley of abuse went far to banish the shooter's regret, and by Brade. Even in that resounding din, a suffocating silence seemed to fall upon the scene. The blazing sunshine, the khaki figures, the crackling mimosas, the dusty belching of the shrapnel, all faded in an instant from his gaze, and in their place appeared a pallid moonlight night, a jagged-topped stone wall bounding a country road, a knot of cowering figures, and finally the form of an old white-bearded man toppling sideways from a shying horse. Why not? As the father had fallen, so let the son fall, a victim of his victims. Twice Brade's rifle went to his shoulder and peeped through the scrub, twice the sights wobbled on the officer's back between the collar and the brown-belted waist; twice it fell again, shaking so violently that the sling-rings rattled against the hard walnut. Murder, mainly because of the definiteness of it, is a terrible job to a man who has never in his life performed a single complete decisive and irrevocable action, one with no single loophole or might-have-been about it. Besides, a miss or a wounding shot would be fatal, even a kill might

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recoil on his own head. The thickets were full of men ; had he been noticed ? Murphy, blundering up alongside, certainly looked queerly at him, and there was an ominous sound in the Colour-Sergeant's " Now, Brade, get on ! " and a terrible feeling in his heavy hand as the N.C.O., passing along the company to beat up the laggards, pushed him for an instant by the shoulder. Brade ventured no more that day, though his eyes were seldom off Maguire. After a time the officer's broad back seemed to become the only object in the field for him. He could have sworn that a painted target, like that at the 200 yards practice-butt, appeared on it, with outer and inner rings complete, and a little black three-inch bull's-eye just in the hollow between the shoulders. Brade was a good shot ; he had often reeled off his ' possible ' at just such a mark. He felt he could not miss it ; if only he dared ! But he only gazed, and at nightfall lay down with his brain on fire. He slept not at all, unless that were sleep in which his eyes stared incessantly along a dark tube a hundred yards long at a round black spot which every now and then turned white as the marker's disc covered it, signalling ' a bull ! ' He could not miss. He scarcely heard the singing gusts. During the alarm caused by the stampeding waggon he was almost the only man of the force who remained on the ground. Only once did he start, and that was when, in the quiet succeeding the turmoil, Maguire's rough voice rose in abuse as he herded his scattered company together. The bull's-eye became bigger, the long tube longer. He could not miss ; nor would he.

Dawn, usually the quietest moment of a battlefield, is also the most intense, for much may have happened in the night, and both sides are sure to have been waiting for it, to peer warily at the other's dispositions. So peering, the scouts of the attack suddenly discovered a band of the

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enemy who, having mistimed the daylight as they stole forward to reconnoitre, dared not fall back, but lay pressed to the ground amongst the rocks close in front. As usual, their numbers were much exaggerated, and a somewhat alarming report reached the brigadier as he was about to attempt his morning wash in a disused beef-tin.

Very soon a staff-officer, his horse's hoofs striking fireworks in the half light, galloped up to the foot of the West Mayos' crest-line, and inquired for the Colonel. "Good morning, sir ; a nice morning. The West Mayos will charge, sir !" The Colonel is taken by surprise. Charging, unseen by him since '78, had been completely banished from his philosophy in this sneaky, crawling campaign. He did not quite know how to set about it—whether merely to 'pass the word,' or to hurl himself, shouting, at the head of his men, sword in hand, pointing to victory or Westminster Abbey. The latter seemed in that silence a too noisy, eke too 'gallery' thing to do ; too like a picture withal, and too unlike Colonel the Honourable Dennis Byrne of the Land and Sea Services Club, Pall Mall. So he passed the word to the Adjutant, who, equally posed, did his best to distribute it amongst as many of the Captains of the front line as he could reach. He omitted, however, to say *what* was to be charged, and, as few had been made aware of the proximity of the enemy, the result was merely a ragged, unenthusiastic, silent run forward by perhaps 150 men out of the whole line lying along the crest.

Nothing particular being in sight the advance soon hesitated, then stopped, and the men dropped to earth in the open. Now the enemy, who, pressed flat as flounders to the earth, had been momentarily expecting an overwhelming onrush, in their relief at this meagre display did a foolish thing. They opened fire on the exposed

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detachment, and in an instant the charm was broken. A yell of "Charge!" "Charge!" "Charge!" broke from the silent main body behind.

A thousand yellow helmets bounced up against the sky, and, like a pack of wolves, the Irish came storming across the flat, poured over both friendly and hostile detachments, and rolled on howling straight for the enemy's mainwork behind. For a space the trenches, taken by surprise, were silent; then a crack like the rending of a cliff burst in the faces of the assault. The irregular line, gapped by losses, splintered and checked before it, and began to drift about in groups, some sideways, some forward, the men shooting incessantly whichever way they ran. In the van, shouting fiercely, strode Maguire, a noble figure. He was almost alone, for he had far outstripped all of his more heavily weighted men—all but one. Close behind him scuttled a bent, bobbing figure. It was Brade, and had there been in that pandemonium anyone to note, it would have appeared marvellous how he kept pace with his officer, seeing that he continually dropped on the knee to fire a shot—a shot not snapped wildly as the others were doing, but carefully sighted. Had there, again, been any to hear, the great sob which followed each discharge would have had a peculiar sound, even in a scene where most men make strange noises.

To himself Brade seemed still to be asleep. He was conscious of nothing about him save a neat round target seen through a V-shaped slip of blued steel, and, as in dreams, everything seemed powerless and worrying. His bullets must be made of dough, his powder of sawdust, for the little bull's-eye seemed strangely hard to hit. Would Maguire never drop? Ah! the back-sight had shifted, he was shooting too high. Another round—the officer flung up his arms with a scream and fell forward

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on his face, a kick or two like that of a swimmer, and he stirred no more. And Brade, too, flinging away his rifle, sank to the ground, babbling and shuddering like a demented child. Soon after silence fell upon the field, for the enemy, not waiting for close quarters, had evacuated their position, and were already invisible when the troops jumped like hurdlers over the earthen parapet and down into the messy, smelly drain, such as a trench soon becomes under fire. In the wake of the assault the stretcher-bearers began to wander about, and it was not long before Brade's twitching body attracted the attention of a pair of them. The man, pressed face downwards, gripping at the earth with his nails, showed all the signs of one badly wounded, and the bearers, depositing their litter beside him, prepared to lift him in, paying little heed at first—for they were well used to such sounds—to his interminable muttering. When they gently turned him over to look for his hurt, hardened as they were to wrecked humanity, they started at the look on Brade's face. But there was not a sign of blood, and the bearers began to think that they were wasting their time on one of those cases, not new to them, of men maddened by fear or fury at the crisis of an attack. "Wot's up!" they demanded. "I've got 'im, got 'im, got 'im," chattered Brade; "got 'im!" he suddenly roared in their faces, "got 'im, I tell ye!" and he sprang to his feet, the bearers backing in alarm. "Got 'em, you mean," growled one of them. "Got the D.T.'s, *I* should say. Got 'oo, you silly blighter?" "Why, Maguire, av coorse," replied Brade in a puzzled voice; "phwat other should I get? I've shot 'im clane and clever between the shoulders, and there 'e lies." The three men moved across to the body of the fallen officer. Sure enough, a terrible wound gaped in the middle of the back, a wound more like the smash of a

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bayonet-thrust than the puncture of a small-bore bullet. "Yes, I've got 'im, sure," muttered Brade, looking down on his work with a smile. With one accord the two bearers closed quietly on him and took him each by an arm. "What did yer down 'im for?" asked one of them, "and in the Lord's name what *with*? Yon was never the work of one of our snivellin' bullets!" "Because I hated him, and he me," answered Brade steadily, "and the holy Saints themselves must have cast that bullet, for I swear 'twas but one out of me magazine."

The General ordered a drum-head court-martial—not a usual nor a very wise thing to do, as a rule, for justice is about the only debt that is paid the better by leisurely liquidation. But the crime had got about the army like wildfire, it was inconvenient to send the prisoner back along an insecure line of communication to the distant base, and in any case Brade made not the least pretence of innocence. He was in due course condemned to death; and just about the moment when, during a truce two days later, his victim was being buried, he himself fell back riddled with a dozen bullets into his nameless grave behind the bivouacs. Since the deed he had shown not a trace either of contrition or fear. His last request had been for a pipe of tobacco. "D'ye think there will be tobacco in heaven?" he had asked of the corporal of his escort. "What's that to you? You're not going there!" the N.C.O., a gentleman ranker with a turn of wit, had neatly replied.

Scarcely had the firing party—a dozen pale-faced youngsters, not one of whom but prayed that not every bullet had found its billet, so that he, at least, might think for the rest of his days that he had missed—scarcely had they lowered their rifles, when an officer came galloping headlong from the front, violently reined in his horse and

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flung himself from the saddle. "Is the man shot?" he shouted excitedly to the subaltern in charge of the execution. The young officer pointed silently to the empty ground, above which nothing but a boot projected. "Good Lord!" groaned the newcomer. "He was innocent; *he* didn't shoot Maguire. The surgeon up on the hill has been examining the dead before burial, passing 'em as qualified, you know, and he has discovered that poor old Maggie wasn't hit from behind at all, but from the front—the fools might have known that a bullet only makes such an awful hole where it comes *out*! Besides, he has actually found the bullet in the poor chap's clothes, and it isn't our pattern at all, but one of the enemy's; it lost all its way in his body, and just dropped clear! Oh! Thank the Lord *I* wasn't a member of that Court-martial!"

IV.

FIVE-FOUR-EIGHT.

I.

RAIN ! pitiless, incessant, drenching rain, that seemed to ooze and trickle and soak into every nook and cranny in the world, beat down upon the already sodden ground and formed great pools of water in every hallow. Fires blazed and flickered at intervals, revealing within the glowing circles of their light the huddled forms of weary soldiers ; and all the myriad sounds of a huge camp blended imperceptibly with the raindrops' steady patter.

According to orders the 8th Division had concentrated upon the main army for the impending battle. At dawn that day its leading battalion had swung out of camp to face the storm and the mud ; not until dusk had the last unit dropped exhausted into its bivouac. For fourteen hours the troops had groped their way along the boggy roads : and they had marched but one-and-twenty miles. Incredibly slow ! incredibly wearisome ! But they had effected the purpose of their chief. They had arrived in time.

The headquarters of the divisional artillery had been established in a ramshackle old barn at one corner of the field in which the batteries were camped. Within its shelter the General and his staff of three crouched over a small fire. The roof leaked, the floor was wet and indescrib-

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ably filthy ; their seats were saddles, and their only light a guttering candle. But to those four tired men, the little fire, the dirty barn, the thought of food and sleep, seemed Heaven.

Brigadier-General Maudeslay, known to his irreverent but affectionate subordinates as 'the Maud,' was a fat little man of fifty, who owed his present rank largely to his steady adherence to principles of sound common-sense. For theoretical knowledge he depended, so he frankly declared, upon the two staff officers with whom he was supplied. Nevertheless, those who knew him well agreed that in quickness to grasp the salient points of any given situation and in accuracy of decision he had few superiors. It was his habit, when pondering on his line of action, to walk round in a circle, his hands behind his back, humming softly to himself. Then, swiftly and with conscious certainty, he would act. And he was seldom wrong.

At the moment, however, his thoughts were not concerned with tactics but with food. For some time he sat before the fire in silence, then suddenly exclaimed—

"Thank the Lord! I hear the baggage coming in. Go and hurry it up, Tony."

Tony, whose rarely used surname was Quarne, was an artillery subaltern of seven years' service, attached to the General's staff as personal A.D.C. On him devolved the irksome task of catering for the headquarter mess. It was his principal, though not his only function : and, owing to scarcity of provisions, a daily change of camp, and a General who took considerable interest in the quality of his food, it was a duty which often taxed his temper and his ingenuity to the utmost.

He got up, wriggled himself into his clammy waterproof and splashed out into the mud and darkness.

"Tony," observed the General to his Brigade-Major, "is not such a failure at this job as you predicted."

"He's astonished me so far, I must confess," was the reply. "I always thought him rather a lazy young gentleman, with no tastes for anything beyond horses and hunting."

"My dear Hartley, he was lazy because he was bored." The General, being devoted to hunting himself, spoke a little testily. "Peace soldiering," he went on, "is apt to bore sometimes. Tony is not what *you'd* call a professional soldier. His military interests are strictly confined to the reputation of his battery, and to his own ability to command two guns in action. Naturally he was pleased when I appointed him A.D.C. The part of the year's work which interested him, practice camp and so on, was over. In place of the tedium of manœuvres as a regimental subaltern, he foresaw a novel and more or less amusing occupation on my staff for the rest of the summer, and he knew that he would go back to his own station in the autumn in time for the hunting season. But he did not reckon on the possibility of war, and therefore he is now dissatisfied. I know it as well as if he'd told me so himself."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Oh! he doesn't dislike the job: I don't mean that. But he can't help feeling that he's been sold. I can almost hear him saying to himself, 'Here have I struggled through seven years' soldierin' thinking always that some day I should be loosed upon a battlefield with a pair of guns and a good fat target of advancing infantry. And now that the time *has* come, I'm stuck with this rotten staff job.'"

"By Jove!" said the other, "I never thought of that."

"No, Hartley, you wouldn't. In your case the 'gunner' instinct has been obliterated by that of the staff officer.

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The guns have lost their fascination for you. Isn't that so ? ”

“ In a way, yes.”

“ Well, in some men—and Tony happens to be one of them—that fascination lasts as long as life itself. Often enough in ordinary times it lies dormant. But as soon as war comes it shows itself at once in the mad rush made by officers to get back to batteries—that is, to go on service *with the guns*. It is the curse of our regiment in some ways : many potential generals abandon their ambitions because of it. But it's also our salvation.”

He relapsed into silence, staring into the fire. Perhaps he, too, regretted for the moment that he was a general, and wished that, instead of thirteen batteries, he commanded only one.

Meanwhile the subject of their discussion had succeeded in finding the headquarters' baggage waggon. Ignoring the protests of infuriated transport officers who were endeavouring to direct more than two hundred vehicles to their destinations, he had lured it out of the chaos and guided it to its appointed place. As the waggon came to a standstill outside the barn the tarpaulin was raised at the back and the vast proportions of the gunner who combined the duties of servant to Tony and cook to the mess slowly emerged.

From his right hand dangled a shapeless flabby mass.

“ What the devil have you got there, Tebbut ? ” demanded Tony.

“ Ducks, sir,” was the unexpected reply. “ We was 'alted near a farm-'ouse to-day, so I took the chanst to buy some milk and butter. While the chap was away fetchin' the stuff, I pinched these 'ere ducks. Fat they are, too ! ”

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He spoke in the matter-of-fact tones of one to whom the theft of a pair of ducks, and the feat of plucking them within the narrow confines of a packed G.S. waggon, was no uncommon experience.

"Well, look sharp and cook 'em. We're hungry," said Tony.

He stayed until he saw that the dinner was well under way, and then floundered off through the mud to see his horses. Of these he was allowed by regulations three, but one, hastily purchased during the mobilisation period by an almost distracted remount officer, had already succumbed to the effects of overwork and under-feeding. There remained the charger which he had had with his battery in peace time, and which he now used for all ordinary work—and Dignity.

The latter was well named. He was a big brown horse, very nearly thoroughbred—a perfect hunter and a perfect gentleman. Tony had bought him as a four-year-old at a price that was really far beyond his means, and had trained him himself. He used openly to boast that Dignity had taken to jumping as a duck takes to water, and that he had never been known to turn from a fence. In the course of four seasons, the fastest burst, the heaviest ground, the longest hunt had never been too much for him. Always he would gallop calmly on, apparently invincible. His owner almost worshipped him.

Horse rugs are not part of the field service equipment of an officer. But to the discerning (and unscrupulous) few there is a way round almost every regulation. Dignity had three rugs, and his legs were swathed in warm flannel bandages. As he stood there on the leeward side of a fence busily searching the bottom of his nose-bag for the last few oats of his meagre ration, he was probably the most comfortable animal of all the thousands in the camp.

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Tony spent some time examining his own and the General's horses, and giving out the orders for the morning to the grooms. By the time he got back to the barn it was past ten, and Tebbut was just solemnly announcing 'dinner' as being served.

'The Maud' eyed the dish of steaming ducks with evident approval, but avoided asking questions. Loot had been very strictly forbidden.

"We ought by rights to have apple sauce with these," he said, drawing his saddle close up to the low deal table and giving vent to a sigh of expectancy.

"Hi've got some 'ere, sir," responded the resourceful Tebbut. "There was a horchard near the road to-day."

He produced, as he spoke, a battered tin which, from the inscription on its label, had once contained 'selected peaches.' It was now more than half-full of a concoction which bore a passable resemblance to apple sauce.

For half an hour conversation languished. They had eaten nothing but a sandwich since early morning, and the demands of appetite were more exacting than their interest in the programme for the morrow.

But as soon as Tebbut, always a stickler for the usages of polite society, had brushed away the crumbs with a dirty dish-cloth and handed round pint mugs containing coffee, Hartley unrolled a map and, under instructions from the General, began to prepare the orders.

As a result of a reconnaissance in force that day the enemy's advanced troops had been driven in, and the extent of his real position more or less accurately defined. The decisive attack, of which the 8th Division was to form a part, was to be directed against the left. Barring the way on this flank, however, was a hill marked on the map as Point 548, which was situate about two miles in front of the main hostile position. The enemy had not yet been

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dislodged from this salient, but a brigade of infantry had been detailed to assault it that night. In the event of success a battery was to be sent forward to occupy it at dawn, after which the main attack would begin. General Maudeslay had been ordered to provide this battery.

"Don't put anything in orders about it, though, Hartley," he said. "It will have to be one from the 81st Brigade, which has suffered least so far. I'll send separate confidential instructions to the Colonel. Get an orderly, will you, Tony."

"I'll take the message myself, sir, if I may," suggested the A.D.C. "It's my own brigade, and I'd like to look them up."

"All right; only don't forget to come back," said the General, smiling.

Tony pocketed the envelope and peered out into the night. The rain had ceased and the sky was clear. Far away to right and left the bivouac fires glimmered like reflections of the starry heavens. The troops, worn out with the hardships of the day, had fallen asleep and the camp was silent. Only the occasional whinny of a horse, the challenge of a sentry, or the distant rumbling of benighted transport broke the stillness.

Tony's way led through the lines of the various batteries. The horses stood in rows, tied by their heads to long ropes stretched between the ammunition waggons. Fetlock-deep in liquid mud, without rugs, wet and underfed, they hung their heads dejectedly—a silent protest against the tyranny of war.

"Poor old hairies," thought Tony as he passed them, his mind picturing the spotless troop-stables and the shining coats that he had known so well in barracks, not a month ago.

He found the officers of his brigade assembled beneath

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a tarpaulin. Their baggage had been hours late, and though it was nearly eleven o'clock the evening meal was still in progress. He handed his message to the Adjutant and sat down to exchange greetings with his brother subalterns.

"Oh! there's bully beef for the batteries, but we've salmon all right on the staff," he sang softly, after sniffing suspiciously at the unpleasant-looking mess on his neighbour's plate, which was, in fact, ration tinned beef boiled hurriedly in a camp kettle. The song, of which the words were his own, fitted neatly to a popular tune of the moment. It treated of the difference in comfort of life on the staff and that in the batteries, and gave a verdict distinctly in favour of the former. He had sung it with immense success about 3 A.M. on his last night at home with his own brigade.

"Now, Tony," said someone, "you're on the staff. What's going to happen to-morrow?"

"A big show—will last two or three days, they say. But," he added, grinning, "you poor devils stuck away behind a hill won't see much of it. I suppose I shall be sent on my usual message—to tell you that you're doing no dam' good and only wasting ammunition!"

But though he chaffed and joked his heart was heavy as he walked back an hour later. Somewhere out there in the mud was his own battery, which he worshipped as a god. And he was condemned to live away from it, to be absent when it dashed into action, when the breech-blocks rattled and the shells shrieked across the valleys.

He found the others still poring over the map. From the wallet on his saddle Tony pulled out a large travelling flask.

"I think that this is the time for the issue of my special emergency ration," he announced.

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"What is it, Tony?" asked 'the Maud.'

"Best old liqueur brandy from our mess in England," he replied, pouring some into each of the four mugs.

Then he held up his own and added—

"Here's to the guns: may they be well served to-morrow."

Over the enamelled rim the General's eyes met Tony's for a moment, and he smiled; for he understood the sentiment.

Tony crawled beneath his blankets and fell into a deep sleep, from which he roused himself with difficulty a few hours later as the first grey streaks of dawn were appearing in the sky.

II.

The press of work at the headquarters of a division during operations comes in periods of intense activity, during which every member of the staff, from the general downwards, feels that he is being asked to do the work of three men in an impossibly short space of time. One of these periods, that in which the orders for the initial stages of the attack had been distributed, had just passed, and a comparative calm had succeeded. Even the operator of the 'buzzer' instrument, ensconced in a little triangular tent just large enough to hold one man in a prone position, had found time to smoke.

Divisional headquarters had been established at a point where five roads met, just below the crest of a low hill. A few yards away the horses clinked their bits and grazed. Occasionally the distant boom of a gun made them prick their ears and stare reflectively in the direction of the sound. The sun, with every promise of a fine day, was slowly dispelling the mist from the valley and woodlands below.

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It was early : the battle had scarcely yet begun.

A huge map had been spread out on a triangular patch of grass at the road junction, its corners held down with stones. Staff officers lay around it talking eagerly. Above, on the top of the hill, General Maudeslay leant against a bank and gazed into the mist. The night attack, he knew, had been successful, and he was anxiously awaiting the appearance of the battery on Point 548.

Tony was stretched at full length on the grass below him. He was warm, he was dry and he was not hungry—a rare combination on service.

"This would be a grand cub-hunting morning, General," he said.

Ordinarily 'the Maud' would have responded with enthusiasm, for hounds and hunting were the passion of his life. But now his thoughts were occupied with other matters, and he made no reply.

Then suddenly, as though at the rising of a curtain at a play, things began to happen. The telephone operator lifted his head with a start as his instrument began to give out its nervous, jerky, *zt—zzz—zt*. There was a clatter of hoofs along the road, and the sliding scrape of a horse pulled up sharply as an orderly appeared and handed in a message. Rifle fire, up till then desultory and unnoticed, began to increase in volume. The mist had gone.

'The Maud,' motionless against the bank, kept his glasses to his eyes for some minutes before lowering them, with a gesture of annoyance, and exclaimed—

"It's curious. That battery ought to be on 548 by now, but I can see no sign of it."

"You can't see 548 from here, sir. It's hidden behind that wood," said Tony, pointing as he spoke.

"What do you mean? There's 548," said the General, also pointing, but to a hill much farther to their right.

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"No, sir—at least not according to my map."

'The Maud' snatched the map from Tony's hand. A second's glance was enough. On it Point 548 was marked as being farther to the left and considerably nearer to the enemy.

He turned on Tony like a flash.

"Good Lord! Why didn't you tell me that before?" he cried. "There must be two different editions of this map. Which one had they in your brigade when you went over there last night—the right one or the wrong one?"

But Tony, unfortunately, had no idea. His interest in tactics, as we have seen, was small, and his visit had not involved him in a discussion of the plan of battle. He had not even looked at their maps.

'The Maud' walked round in one small circle while he hummed eight bars. Then he said—

"They must have started for the wrong hill, and in this mist they won't have realised their danger. That battery will be wiped out unless we can stop it." He looked round quickly. "Signallers—no—useless: and the telephone not yet through. Tony, you'll have to go. There's no direct road. Go straight across country and you may just do it."

Tony was already half-way to the horses.

"Take up Dignity's stirrups two holes," he called as he ran towards them. "Quick, man, quick!"

It took perhaps twenty seconds, which seemed like as many minutes. He flung away belt and haversack, crammed his revolver into a side pocket and was thrown up into the saddle. 'The Maud' himself opened the gate off the road.

"Like hell, Tony, like hell!"

The General's words, shouted in his ear as he passed

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through on to the grass, seemed echoed in the steady beat of Dignity's hoofs as he went up to his bridle and settled into his long raking stride.

Tony leant out on his horse's neck, his reins crossed jockey fashion, his knees pressed close against the light hunting saddle. Before him a faded expanse of green stretched out for two miles to the white cottage on the hillside which he had chosen as his point. The rush of wind in his ears, the thud of iron-shod hoofs on sound old turf, the thrill that is born of speed, made him forget for a moment the war, the enemy, his mission. He was back in England on a good scenting morning in November. Hounds were away on a straight-necked fox, and he had got a perfect start. Almost could he see them beside him, "close packed, eager, silent as a dream."

This was not humdrum soldiering—cold and hunger, muddy roads and dreary marches. It was Life.

"Steady, old man."

He leant back, a smile upon his lips, as a fence was flung behind them and the bottom of the valley came in sight.

"There's a brook : must chance it," he muttered, and then, mechanically and with instinctive eye, he chose his place. He took a pull until he felt that Dignity was going well within himself, and then, fifty yards away, he touched him with his heels and let him out. The stream, swollen with the deluge of the previous day, had become a torrent of swirling muddy water, and it was by no means narrow. But Dignity knew his business. Gathering his powerful quarters under him in the last stride, he took off exactly right and fairly hurled himself into space.

They landed with about an inch to spare.

"Good for you!" cried Tony, standing in his stirrups and looking back as they breasted the slope beyond.

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From the top he had hoped to see the battery somewhere on the road, but he found that the wood obstructed his view, and he was still uncertain, therefore, as to whether he was in time or not.

"It's a race," he said, and sat down in his saddle to ride a finish.

But half-way across the next field Dignity put a foreleg into a blind and narrow drain and turned completely over.

Tony was thrown straight forward on to his head and stunned.

A quarter of an hour later he had recovered consciousness and was staring about him stupidly. The air was filled with the din of battle, but apparently the only living thing near him was Dignity, quietly grazing. He noticed, at first without understanding, that the horse moved on three legs only. His off foreleg was swinging. Tony got up and limped stiffly towards him. He bent down to feel the leg and found that it was broken.

Slowly, reluctantly, he pulled out his revolver and put in a cartridge. It was, perhaps, the hardest thing he had ever had to do. He drew Dignity's head down towards the ground, placed the muzzle against his forehead and fired.

The horse swayed for a fraction of a second, then collapsed forward, lifeless, with a thud: and Tony felt as though his heart would break.

Gradually he began to remember what had happened, and he wondered vaguely how long he had lain unconscious. In front of him stretched the wood which he had seen before he started, hiding from his view not only the actual hill but the road which led to it. He knew that on foot, bruised and shaken as he was, he could never now arrive in time. He had failed and must return.

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Then, as he stood sadly watching Dignity's fast glazing eyes, he heard the thunder of hundreds of galloping hoofs, and looked up quickly. Round the corner of the wood, in wild career, came, not a cavalry charge as he had half-expected, but teams—gun teams and limbers—but no guns. The battery had got into action on the hill, but a lucky hostile shell, wide of its mark, had dropped into the waggon line and stampeded the horses. A few drivers still remained, striving in vain to pull up. They might as well have tried to stop an avalanche.

Tony watched them flash past him to the rear. Still dazed with his fall, it was some seconds before the truth burst upon him.

He knew those horses.

"My God!" he cried aloud, "it's my own battery that's up there!"

In a moment all thought of his obvious duty—to return and report—was banished from his mind. He forgot the staff and his connection with it. One idea, and one only, possessed him—somehow, anyhow, to get to the guns.

Dizzily he started off towards the hill. His progress was slow and laboured. His head throbbed as though there was a metal piston within beating time upon his brain. The hot sun caused the sweat to stream into his eyes. The ground was heavy, and his feet sank into it at every step. Twice he stopped to vomit.

At last he reached the road and followed the tracks of the gun-wheels up it until he came to the gap in the hedge through which the battery had evidently gone on its way into action. The slope was strewn with dead and dying horses: drivers were crushed beneath them; and an up-ended limber pointed its pole to the sky like the mast of a derelict ship. The ground was furrowed with the impress of many heavy wheels, and everywhere was ripped and

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scarred with the bullet marks of low-burst shrapnel. But ominously enough, amid all these signs of conflict no hostile fire seemed to come in his direction.

The hill rose sharply for a hundred yards or so, and then ran forward for some distance nearly flat. Tony therefore, crawling up, did not see the battery until he was quite close to it.

Panting, he stopped aghast and stared.

Four guns were in position with their waggons beside them. The remnants of the detachments crouched behind the shields. Piles of empty cartridge-cases and little mounds of turf behind the trails testified that these four guns, at least, had been well served. But the others! One was still limbered up: evidently a shell had burst immediately in front of it. Its men and horses were heaped up round it almost as though they were tin soldiers which a child had swept together on the floor. The remaining gun pointed backward down the hill, forlorn and desolate.

In the distance, for miles and miles, the noise of battle crashed and thundered in the air. But here it seemed some magic spell was cast, and everything was still and silent as the grave.

Sick at heart, Tony contemplated the scene of carnage and destruction for one brief moment. Then he made his way towards the only officer whom he could see, and from him learnt exactly what had happened.

The major commanding the battery, it appeared, deceived first by the map and then by the fog, had halted his whole battery where he imagined that it was hidden from view. But as soon as the mist had cleared away he found that it was exposed to the fire of the hostile artillery at a range of little more than a mile. The battery had been caught by a hail of shrapnel before it could get into action. Only this one officer remained, and there were but just

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enough men to work the four guns that were in position. Ammunition, too, was getting very short.

Tony looked at his watch. It was only eight o'clock. From his vague idea of the general plan of battle he knew that the decisive attack would eventually sweep forward over the hill on which he stood. But how soon?

At any moment the enemy might launch a counter-attack and engulf his battery. Its position could hardly have been worse. Owing to the flat top of the hill nothing could be seen from the guns except the three hundred yards immediately in front of them and the high ground a mile away on which the enemy's artillery was posted. The intervening space was hidden. Yet it was impossible to move. Any attempt to go forward to where they could see, or backward to where they would be safe, would be greeted, Tony knew well enough, with a burst of fire which would mean annihilation. Besides, he remembered the stampeding waggon line. The battery was without horses, immobile. To wait patiently for succour was its only hope.

Having ascertained that a man had been posted out in front to give warning of an attack, Tony sat down to await developments with philosophic calm. The fact that he had no right to be there at all, but that his place was with the General, did not concern him in the slightest. It had always been his ambition "to fight a battery in the real thing," as he would himself have phrased it, and he foresaw that he was about to do so with a vengeance. He was distressed by the havoc that he saw, but in all other respects he was content.

For hours nothing happened. The enemy evidently considered that the battery was effectually silenced, and did not deign to waste further ammunition upon it. Then,

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when Tony had almost fallen asleep, the sentry at the forward crest semaphored in a message—

“ Long thick line of infantry advancing : will reach foot of hill in about five minutes. Supports behind.” Almost at the same moment an orderly whom Tony recognised as belonging to his General’s staff arrived from the rear. Tony seized upon him eagerly.

“ Where have you come from ? ” he demanded.

“ From the General, sir. ’E sent me to find you and to tell you to come back.”

“ Did you pass any of our infantry on your way ? ”

“ Yes, sir. There’s a lot coming on. They’ll be round the wood in a minute or two.”

“ Well, go back to them and give *any* officer this message,” said Tony, writing rapidly in his note-book.

“ Beg pardon, sir, but that will take me out of my way. I’m the last orderly the General ’as got left, and I was told to find out what ’ad ’appened ’ere, and then to come straight back.”

“ I don’t care a damn what you were told. You go with that message *now*.”

The man hurried off, and Tony walked along the line of guns, saw that they were laid on the crest line in front and that the fuzes were set at zero. This would have the effect of bursting the shell at the muzzles, and so creating a death-zone of leaden bullets through which the attacking infantry would have to fight their way. Then he took up his post behind an ammunition waggon on the right of the battery and fixed his eyes on the signaller in front. He felt himself to be in the same state of tingling excitement as when he waited outside a good fox-covert expecting the welcome “ Gone away.”

Suddenly the signaller rose, and, crouching low, bolted back towards the guns. Just as he reached them a few

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isolated soldiers began to appear over the crest in front. As soon as they saw the guns they lay down waiting for support. They were the advanced scouts of a battalion.

A moment afterwards, a thick line of men came in sight. The sun gleamed on their bayonets. There was a shout, and they surged forward towards the battery.

"Three rounds gun fire," Tony shouted. The four guns went off almost simultaneously, and at once the whole front was enveloped in thick white smoke from the bursting shell. In spite of diminished detachments the guns were quickly served. Again and once again they spoke within a second of each other.

The smoke cleared slowly, for there was scarcely a breath of wind. Meanwhile the assailants had taken cover and were beginning to use their rifles. Bullets, hundreds of them, tore the ground in front and clanged against the shields. Tony stepped back a few yards and looked down into the valley behind him. A thin line of skirmishers had almost reached the foot of the hill. His message had been delivered.

He came back to the cover of his waggon. The enemy began to come forward by rushes—a dozen men advancing twenty yards perhaps.

"Repeat," said Tony.

Again the guns blazed and roared: again the pall of smoke obscured the view. A long trailing line of infantry began to climb the hill behind him. But the enemy was working round the flanks of the battery and preparing for the final rush. It was a question of whether friend or foe would reach him first. For the second time that day Tony muttered "It's a race!"

Then, as he saw the whole line rise and charge straight at him—

"Gun fire," he yelled above the din, knowing that by

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that order the ammunition would be expended to the last round.

He jumped to the gun nearest him, working the breech with mechanical precision, while the only gunner left in the detachment loaded and fired.

"Last round, sir," came in a hoarse whisper, as Tony slammed the breech and leant back with left arm outstretched ready to swing it open again. In front they could see nothing: the smoke hung like a thick white blanket. Tony drew his revolver and stood up, peering over the shield, expecting every moment to see a line of bayonets emerge.

There was a roar behind. He heard the rush of feet and the rattle of equipment. He was conscious of the smell of sweating bodies and the sight of wild frenzied faces. Then the charge, arriving just in time, swept past him, a mad irresistible wave of humanity, driving the enemy before it and leaving the guns behind like rocks after the passage of a flood.

Tony fell back over the trail in a dead faint.

Long afterwards, when the tide of battle had rolled on towards the opposing heights, Tony, pale, grimy, but exultant, started back with the intention of rejoining his General. Half-way down the hill he met him riding up.

Tony turned and walked beside him.

"What's happened here, and where the devil have you been all day?" asked 'the Maud' angrily.

"I've been here, sir."

"So it appears. I sent an orderly to find you, and all you did was to despatch him on a message of your own, I understand. We were in urgent need of information as to what had happened up here. You failed to stop this

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battery, and it was your duty to come straight back and tell me so."

Tony had never seen the placid Maud so angry. He glanced up at him as he sat there bolt upright on his horse looking straight to his front.

"It was my own battery," said Tony. Then, after a pause, he added recklessly—"Would you have come back, sir, if you'd been me?"

The Maud stared past him up the hill. He saw the guns, with the dead and wounded strewn around them, safe. He was a gunner first, a general only afterwards. He hummed a little tune.

"No," he said, "I wouldn't."

V.

THE REGIMENTAL DURBAR.

I.

IN a British regiment, as is well known to several millions of men who are now again civilians, but who have had the honour and glory of fighting in the Great War, there is, when the enemy permits, a daily ceremony known as *Orderly Room*. At the appointed hour and place, the Adjutant and the Sergeant-Major produce before the Colonel such malefactors as require correction for their major or minor military offences, known in the service severally and collectively as 'crimes.' These vary from indulging in a little too much 'back chat' to a corporal, or a slight effervescence of spirits at inopportune hours, to desertion in face of the enemy, or eloping with the company's cash-box. The procedure is, however, exactly the same: the Colonel either deals with the case himself, or relegates the culprit to various Courts-Martial of intensive degrees of severity. *Orderly Room*, in fact, is the daily Court of Justice of the regiment.

In many, perhaps the majority of Indian regiments, this form of jurisdiction is replaced by another, which experience has shown is more in conformity with Indian ideas. For the formal British *Orderly Room* is substituted the *Regimental Durbar*, an assembly composed of all and sundry who may care to be present; and which

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is not only a judicial court where the Colonel deals out summary justice, but is also a formal but perfectly democratic assembly, whereat it is open to anyone, whether the most senior officer present or the last-joined trumpeter, to have his say on any broad point connected with the wellbeing of the regiment. To emphasise the democratic nature of these durbars, it is open not only to officers, but also to the men to attend in mufti. It is not in the least impossible for the first case brought before the Colonel to be one of murder, rape, or sacrilege, in which event he would probably hand over the accused to the civil authorities ; whilst the last may be connected with so ordinary a matter as the regimental sports, regarding which on some subtle point the boy trumpeter may have a few useful remarks to make. He in such case would be pushed forward by his bearded comrades to have his say before the Colonel and assembled Sahibs.

There is, however, one golden rule in the conduct of Regimental Durbars which wise Colonels observe, and that is never to make a sit-down affair of it. This for the simple, though perhaps unworthy, reason that once a circle of Indians is firmly seated they take hours to dig up. Time is no object to an Oriental ; it matters not in the least to him whether the Durbar lasts one hour or six, so long as he is squatting in some form or another, be it on his hunkers or on a chair. Thus the worldly-wise Colonel holds his Durbars in the open field, or on the edge of a verandah, or under a friendly tree, but always standing. To remain standing indefinitely does not in the least appeal to an Indian, and thus business is healthily and automatically expedited, enabling the dusky warrior to get away and squat, and, incidentally, smoke his bubbling pipe.

First, the squadron or company commanders hold their

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durbars, at which they examine the feet of newly-shod horses, inspect any men who have been supplied with new uniforms, allot remounts to those whose horses have been cast, hear complaints, grant short leave to the deserving, and inflict minor punishments on those who have earned them. The squadron accounts are also read out, so that the men may know how their money is being spent.

When these minor durbars are completed, the squadron commander, followed by his flock, joins up at the main Durbar to be held by the commanding officer. One of the first episodes at this is the periodical swearing in of recruits, which is made a formal and impressive ceremony in many regiments. Headed by the Regimental Colours, the recruits, in full dress, are marched forward and formed up in line facing the Colonel, whilst the Colours are so held that the recruit takes his oath of loyalty and discipline under their shadow. This oath each recruit proclaims in a loud voice in his own vernacular—and there are sometimes half a dozen different ones in a regiment—so that all may hear. He swears by all he holds most sacred, be it the Koran, or Guru Granth, or other strange god, that he will be loyal to the King his Emperor, that he will obey his superior officers in all things, that he will fight bravely against the King's enemies, and that he will go cheerfully and willingly wherever he is sent, whether by land or by sea. The recruit has usually been a year or so in the regiment before he is thus sworn in, and knows exactly what his obligations are. If he does not want to take this oath he may go, and there are plenty of others waiting for his place.

Very great tact and a thorough knowledge of every class of Indian in the regiment is required by a commanding officer, as one incident amongst many may demon-

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strate. One day a Gurkha, greenish-yellow with rage, came before the Colonel with his puggri off and holding in his hand what looked like a lock of hair. It was ! Spluttering with rage, he told his story. He was having a slight difference of opinion with a Yusufzai Pathan (may he perish in hell) regarding some small matter, and as is customary both sides began to make scandalous aspersions regarding the virtue and perfect rectitude of each other's female relations, more especially with reference to their several mothers and sisters. The Pathan, as is not unusual, was 6 feet in height, whilst the Gurkha, as is usual, was under 5 ft. 2 in. Using his superior height, complainant said, the Pathan knocked off his cap, which left him with a close-cropped head, on the crown of which was grown a thin long whisp for a special purpose. According to the religion of the Gurkha, he must always grow this whisp and keep it in good serviceable order, for by this alone can his god lift him up to heaven when he dies. The Pathan seized this whisp, probably merely to give it a tweak, though the Gurkha said of malice prepense ; and it so happened that he was stronger than he thought, for the whole hope of salvation came away in his hand. " And here it is," vociferated the Gurkha, handing up the lock of hair to the Colonel. As he proceeded to explain, not only had this treatment hurt him exceedingly, but also was it a studied insult from a Mahomedan to a Hindu ; moreover, if he died or was killed in battle before he could grow a new whisp of hair, he would perforce have to go to hell, because there was nothing left wherewith he might be lifted up to heaven. Furthermore, and this was possibly nearest his heart, he had to pay Rs. 25 to his priest for having lost his sacred lock. The Colonel with difficulty kept his countenance, but called for the Pathan. The Pathan was very apologetic, said

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the Gurkha had spoken lies about his female relations, but truth about the unhappy affray ; that he only meant a little rough horseplay, and had no intention of insulting the Gurkha or his religion.

“ Very well, Ahmed Shah ; you will pay the fine of Rs. 25 which Singh Bir has to pay ” (Ahmed Shah’s face fell four holes, for it would take five months to pay off this fine), “ and if ever I catch you at that sort of horseplay again, out of the regiment you go *ek dum* ” (at a moment’s notice).

Ahmed Shah saluted and retired.

“ As for you, Singh Bir, I heartily condole with you, and shall send word to your priest that your top-knot was lost, so to speak, on active service. And I shall ask him, in the event of your premature decease, that this accident may be made known to your deity, so that he may seize you by some other part of your person, and thus carry you to heaven.”

Singh Bir, now with a broad and satisfied grin, remarked, “ Your Honour is Lord ! ” and saluting, departed.

Unskilfully handled, the incident might have resulted in a bloody battle between 100 Gurkhas and 100 Pathans armed to the teeth.

Various reports and many subjects would be brought up at the Regimental Durbar and discussed at length ; but in old days, when soldiering was more free and easy than it became later, the natural tedium of too much business might be agreeably interrupted by more interesting diversions.

In a popular regiment, or one with a great fighting name, there are often a large number of men waiting to enlist for whom there is no vacancy. On one such an occasion the Colonel suddenly thought of a novel method of selection. There was one vacancy, and many appli-

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cants were brought forward at Durbar by their friends in and out of the regiment in the hope of obtaining it. A good many of these the Colonel at once told to stand back, as manifestly not up to standard; then he made the rest strip, and carefully selected the best six. To these he said, "You are all fine young men and of good stamp, but I am unable to select one of you who is better than the rest. These, then, are my orders. We will after Durbar all proceed to the rifle-range, which is close by, and you shall each fire five shots at the target at 200 yards, and five shots at the target at 500 yards, and he who hitteth the bull's-eye most often shall receive the vacant place and be enlisted in 'The Guides.' I have spoken."

"Shahbash! Bravo! It is well spoken," exclaimed the men.

When the Durbar was over the candidates, accompanied by their friends and relations, trooped off to the rifle-range, and the greatest excitement prevailed. As each shot was signalled, the friends of the shooter either loudly congratulated him or equally loudly condoled with him, and condemned the marker to perdition. Rival candidates and their friends, on the contrary, were unanimously of opinion that the bull's-eye when made was a fluke which would never be repeated, and when a miss was signalled, considered that the marker was a righteous person worthy of every commendation. Finally, two men tied, and whilst each was firmly convinced and affirmed that the scorer was a man of inferior birth and blemished morals who had undoubtedly cheated him, they decided to toss up for the vacancy.

One of our Colonels was a remarkably good shot, both with the gun and with the rifle, and it was his habit to keep his eye in for the latter weapon by practising at crows with a rook rifle. As is well known, the Indian

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crow is a most pushing and impertinent fellow, as well as being an expert and audacious thief, and if too much tolerated collects in his hundreds and makes a garden, for instance, an unpleasant place to walk in. At the same time, he is a very observant bird, almost uncannily so, and knows as well as you or I the difference between a walking-stick and a rook rifle. To pretend that a walking-stick is a rifle, bringing it smartly to the shoulder as if about to shoot, merely lays one open to the most studied disregard. On the other hand, if the most guileless-looking person with a nonchalant air, carefully concealing a rook rifle behind his back, approaches, every crow within view instantly departs, making the rudest remarks in a raucous voice.

By way of combining business, sport of sorts and instruction in the art of shooting, the Colonel used very often to hold his Durbar under a lofty cotton-tree in the mess garden, which was the favourite rendezvous of all the crows in the district. After the squadron commanders had settled the smaller affairs at the squadron durbars, they would wend their way to the Colonel, and a fairly safe draw was the cotton-tree. Here the Colonel might pretty surely be found with his back against the trunk, his rifle carefully concealed, keeping a silent but exceedingly alert vigil.

As often as not, the arrival of these parties of men, far from discouraging the return of the crows, gave them confidence. They doubtless said amongst themselves, "The old man will now be too busy talking to these soldiers to notice, so let us take advantage of this to steal a few more things."

The Durbar opens. "This man, Ram Pershad," says 'A' squadron commander, "wants seven days' leave to visit his home to bury his mother."

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"But he has already on three previous occasions obtained seven days' leave to bury his mother," remarks the Colonel, who knows everyone in the regiment and all their affairs to the fifth generation.

"Yes, sir, but he says that his mother on the other occasions, though very ill, did not die. But she really has died this time," replies with great solemnity 'A' squadron commander.

"Wait a second," mutters the Colonel, and very quietly producing his rifle, draws a bee-line on a marauding crow perched high on the cotton-tree. Crack goes the rifle and down comes the crow. The men say gravely, "Wah ! Wah ! The Colonel Sahib sights his shots very well." The Colonel reloads his rifle, returns to business and gives his verdict.

"Well, let Ram Pershad go this time. But enter in his sheet-roll" (soldier's pocket-book) "that his mother is dead and buried. I shall also view with some suspicion the declining health of other members of his family for some time."

Ram Pershad grins, salutes and hastily departs. Curiously enough, on his arrival home he is met by an elderly but quite robust lady, whom he embraces affectionately and calls "Ma." Nor do there appear to be any visible signs and portents that a funeral is about to take place. Nevertheless Ram Pershad sighs deeply, for his very best wheeze is dead.

II.

One day after the discussion of greater matters, an Indian officer, with a fatherly smile, remarked that one of the young warriors had something to say. The young warrior, on being pushed to the front, said he wished to make a petition. A friend of his, who was also a warrior, had

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with conspicuous guile captured a cobra. A cobra, as everyone knows, is a very deadly reptile, for a bite from a cobra means certain death within three hours. But a cobra can only bite with his head, therefore the said warrior took the opportunity when the said cobra was hastily retiring into a hole head first, to seize it by the tail. Holding the tail tight with his left hand, he clasped the cobra's body with his right hand, and then gently pulled. As more and more of the snake came unwillingly forth, the warrior kept on slipping his right hand forward till, when the cobra's head at length emerged, he had him tight by the tail with his left hand and tight round the neck with his right hand. Thus disposed, the cobra could hiss and fume and show his exceeding annoyance, but could do no harm. Thus carrying him delicately to the lines, the warrior called to another warrior for a sack, into which he skilfully hurled the cobra, and standing well clear tied up the mouth.

Now it so happened that in the same squadron there was yet another warrior who had a pet mongoose. As those learned in zoology know, a mongoose is an animal, in appearance somewhat like an English stoat, which is reputed to have a positive passion for dining off venomous snakes, and especially off cobras. The cobra, naturally not being a consenting party to this gastronomic eccentricity, puts up a fierce fight, and as often as not deals a poisoned blow to his enemy which obviates any necessity for future foraging expeditions.

This warrior now stepped to the front with his pet mongoose on his shoulder, and made request that the Sahib would act as umpire in a fight between the mongoose and the cobra. The Colonel readily consented, for none of us had ever been satisfactorily convinced from ocular demonstration that so harmless and impotent-

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looking an animal as a mongoose could really kill a cobra, the deadliest of the enemies of mankind. The first warrior was therefore sent off to fetch the sack containing the cobra, and the Durbar as a whole prepared to take a short respite from its less interesting labours.

Close by happened to be a set of disused officers' quarters, which had a large room on the ground floor, lately the drawing-room of a beautiful lady, but now quite empty. This room, as if made for the purpose, formed an ideal arena for the classic battle. Two large French windows gave an excellent view into the interior, and these very conveniently furnished, with a little crowding and the use of overturned flower-pots and empty boxes, to a score or more of men, the advantages of the dress circle and upper boxes. These spectators were also quite safe. Inside the room the mantelpiece afforded accommodation for a few of the most honoured of the spectators, amongst whom were the Colonel, one Major, the Adjutant and a stray subaltern. The only disadvantage of this seemingly favoured position was that though safe whilst on the mantelpiece, those on it would have to pass through exceeding perils if a call from the General or some other Imperial occasion should demand their passage across the floor whilst the cobra was in possession.

In the corner of the room was a high ladder left by the workmen who had been mending the ceiling. Each of the rungs of this ladder was occupied, great politeness being exhibited by the younger officers in pointing out to their seniors the stupendous and indeed dangerous difficulty of climbing to the higher rungs. A few heroes who happened to have on riding-boots and carried swagger-canes stood on the floor against the wall.

Before the conflict begins, be it known to those not inured to cobras that this unpleasant person cannot bite

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when he is lying along the ground or when wriggling along it. He must erect about half his length to strike, and when thus standing the erect part is about the height of an ordinary man's forearm when, with his elbow on the table, he raises it at right angles. Within the radius of that uplifted head is death ; outside it, even by the fraction of an inch, is perfect safety. The only immunity is if a high boot or other impervious obstacle intervenes ; whilst the attacker is, when standing erect to strike, extremely susceptible to a smart stroke on the neck from a cane. Indeed, his funeral may at once be arranged, for this stroke, if truly aimed, breaks the cobra's spine, and that is the end of him.

The audience being now accommodated, the warrior, holding a sack with great delicacy at arm's-length, is seen approaching, and he finds no difficulty whatever in making an easy passage through the crowd at the east window. Opening this window, he cuts the string at the mouth of the sack, deftly turns it over, and shoots the cobra into the room, shutting the window with remarkable celerity when this feat is accomplished.

The cobra, doubtless a little surprised at the brusque treatment, looked along the legs of the booted heroes, and seeing nothing particularly obnoxious about them, made off to a dark and quiet corner, curled up and went to sleep. The second warrior, the owner of the mongoose, now appeared at the other window, and, though bare-legged and bare-footed, was so confident in the prowess of his champion that he walked into the room and placed the mongoose on the floor not far from the cobra. The cobra slept on, or pretended to do so, whilst the mongoose, not taking the slightest notice of him, carefully inspected the immaculate boots of the junior subaltern. These boots were a source of justifiable pride to the junior

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subaltern, and were, indeed, so brilliant that any mongoose might rightly admire them.

Clearly, however, some steps were required to encourage the latent ardour of the combatants. To this end the master of the mongoose threw little bits of raw meat in the direction of the cobra, which the mongoose, immediately neglecting the shining boots, proceeded to devour. This woke up the cobra, and he stood up to his full height and used some manifestly strong language. Whilst thus erect, he looked very menacing to the gentlemen on the ladder quite close to him, and one stout Indian officer, who was seated on the lowest rung, looked hastily down and fervently exclaimed, "Perchance that devil will not seize me by the hinder parts?"

And now was to be seen a very curious piece of play. The thrower of meat cast one small bit just inside the radius of the cobra's strike. The mongoose went and had a look at it, but saw at once that he would be badly, indeed fatally, had if he entered the deadly circle; he would therefore have none of it. Another piece of meat was thrown, and fell just short of the other piece. The mongoose went up to this, and as he arrived the cobra gave two rapid strikes, but they fell just a fraction of an inch short of the piece of meat. The mongoose never turned a hair or blinked an eye, but calmly went on eating the meat, knowing that, one-eighth of an inch outside the circle, he was as safe as if he were one hundred yards away.

We all thought that the fight was off, and were beginning to wonder how we were going to get out of the room in safety and with dignity, and what was to be done about a loose cobra. Then something happened all of a flash. The cobra, red-hot with rage, still stood hissing death and destruction; he doubtless, too, was rather

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sore about the gills from having hit the floor so fiercely. The mongoose, seeming to grow reckless in his nonchalance, turned broadside on. The cobra hissed, "Thank God, I have got him!" and struck hard. The next second we saw that the mongoose had caught the cobra by the back of the neck at the exact moment when his fangs, missing their aim by a fraction, hit the floor. In less seconds than this sentence takes to write, the cobra was dead, bitten right through the back of the neck, thus severing the spine.

III.

Strange problems sometimes face the Colonel. One day at Durbar an Indian officer, one Ali Gul, an Afridi, brought up his son for enlistment—for everyone, high or low, rich or poor, had to go through the ranks. Side by side riding in the ranks might be seen a prince of the blood and the son of a peasant. But it was more usual for an Indian officer first to take so near a relation as a son to the Colonel's bungalow, so that he might get the Colonel's private opinion as to whether the lad was up to the standard of the regiment or not, thus avoiding the chance of having him publicly rejected on the grounds of poor physique before all the men in open Durbar. Ali Gul himself was a splendid fellow, of magnificent physique, and as brave as a lion, who had already twice won the Star for Valour in battle.

His son, standing beside him, looked a poor creature—small, thin and apparently of no stamina. The Colonel was rather embarrassed; he did not like to reject offhand the son of so brave and good a soldier, and thus blacken his face before the assembled multitude, nor did he care to take a lad evidently much below the usual standard to oblige anyone. So he said, "Quite a nice boy, Ali

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Gul, who will doubtless fill out. Give him another year, and lots of good food, and then we will see about it." But Ali Gul would not take the hint. He stood his ground, and looking the Colonel square in the eyes, made answer—

"I know what is in your heart, Sahib. You think my son is not big enough or strong enough to be a soldier in 'The Guides.' But there are brave men who are neither big nor strong. Was not Lord Roberts, Sahib, such a one? Now let me tell your Honour a story which will show that this lad is not unworthy. A few weeks ago my son and a young friend of his, each aged about seventeen years, were making their way home through the mountains. Each of them had a Martini-Henry rifle in his hand, for, as your Honour knows, no unarmed man dare pass through the Afridi country. As they were hurrying along a shot rang out, and my boy's friend fell on the path grievously wounded. My son immediately got behind a rock and looked carefully around. Two more shots passed close to him, but he could not see whence they came, for the powder was smokeless. Moreover, his own rifle being a Martini-Henry, which fires black powder and makes a smoke, would instantly give away his position if he fired it. A few more shots came, and then, as the wounded boy on the path did not move, the marauders thought they had killed both, and that it was now safe to come down and carry off their rifles, each of which is worth nearly Rs. 500 (£50) in that country. But they moved with great caution, only one man advancing whilst the others covered his advance. My boy, lying flat on the ground, wriggled to one side of the rock, and putting his sight at 500 yards, took careful aim and shot the robber stone-dead, and he fell headlong downwards. The smoke of his rifle gave away

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my son's position, and immediately a brisk and accurate fusilade hit that spot. But my son was not there, for the moment he had fired he dodged away from that rock, and like a cat worked his way unseen to another rock fully fifty yards away. He now knew whereabouts the enemy were, and watched and waited. After firing several more rounds he saw two men begin to advance, but very cautiously, and giving no chance for a shot. Thus they skirmished steadily on towards the spot where the wounded lad lay, and it was not till they were within 100 yards that my lad got another chance. He then saw a head cautiously raised and peering intently at the rock whence my son had fired his first shot. In one second my son, who was on the flank, lifted his rifle and shot this second man dead through the head. He then repeated his first manœuvre and, without showing himself, slipped behind another rock, and waited for a long time. A loose stone came bowling down the hill and passed him, then he heard a scrambling and peered forth with much caution. A man was running away, zigzagging up the hill. He let him go from reasons of caution, and then, after another long wait, crept along to his companion, whom he found still alive. As all was now quiet, he approached the nearest dead enemy and took his rifle and ammunition, and then went on and fetched the rifle and ammunition of the other enemy he had killed. Carrying three rifles and three bandoliers, he ran many miles to my house, and thence brought back his uncle and brother to help his comrade home. Now, Sahib," concluded Ali Gul, "you have heard my story. Is the lad good enough for 'The Guides' or is he not? His fate is in your Honour's hands."

"Bravo!" said the Colonel; "without doubt he is a fine fellow, and brave of heart." Then turning to the

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Adjutant, "Enlist him from to-day, and make him a Lance-Naick (Lance-Corporal) on the spot."

Sometimes there are complaints made against the men by outsiders—villagers, tradesmen, or money-lenders. These all attend Durbar, and make their complaints to the Colonel before all assembled. The villagers' complaints generally referred to the regimental grass-cutters, more especially in old days before each regiment had been given a piece of Government land on which to grow grass. Indian cavalry horses are fed on fresh-cut grass gathered in daily for about half the year, whilst hay is stacked at the same time for the remaining period. This grass used to be obtained from the sides of roads, the borders of fields, railway or canal embankments, from anywhere and everywhere, the grass-cutters going many miles daily in search of fresh fields. Whilst cutting the grass, their pack-mules or ponies, though knee-haltered, might well stray off into the villagers' crops : hence these tears.

With these villagers the Colonel would take a fatherly air. He would have a little chat and banter with them, and thus get them into a good temper. Then he would point how extraordinarily lucky they were to have so fine a regiment quartered near them, a regiment which bought all their barley and oats and chickens and eggs, and was, in fact, a perfect godsend to them. Moreover, were not many of their sons and brothers soldiers too, who would never harm villagers wilfully ? And he would wind up by pointing out that these were no private horses, but the horses of the great King, and that unless they are fed the soldiers could not fight and kill the enemies of the King, so that the villagers might live in peace and safety, and gather in their crops and become rich.

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With money-lenders the Colonel would have a very short and sharp way. He would tell them it was against his orders that money should be lent to the men, and if they did so it was at their own risk. The Civil Courts were open to them. With trades-people it was different. If such a one had a claim against one of the men, he had to substantiate it; and if after discussion it was judged correct, the soldier would be ordered to pay off the debt in monthly instalments.

In these seemingly rough-and-ready ways the affairs of an Indian regiment are managed, and with great success. The prestige of the British officer is so high, and his absolute integrity and honour so well established, that just a sprinkling of them will thus rule and keep in a state of perfect discipline a regiment of a thousand Indians. And these, be it remembered, are not like a thousand Englishmen or Scotsmen, all of one blood; but there may be amongst them half a dozen different tribes and as many castes and religions. And these various sects and classes and tribes are often fiercely antagonistic to each other, and would be at each other's throats in five minutes at the smallest provocation but for the calm control of their British officers. It is not mere lip-service or oriental flattery, but a deeply-rooted sentiment, which will cause an Indian to murmur oft-times, "Indeed, these Englishmen are a nation of princes."

VI.

THE SHUNTING PUZZLE.

“Si l'on considère combien il faut de prévoyance pour exécuter le plus petit mouvement . . . on doit se convaincre de la nécessité qu'il y a de donner d'avance mille ordres préparatoires sans lesquels les mouvements rapides sont impossibles.”

—*Letter, Marmont to Dorsenne, Feb. 23, 1812.*

I.

ON the other side of the Great Inland Sea lies the Desert. Even on the map it seems to spread far and wide and featureless, its borders shading off with a thin sprinkling of names: names we do not recognise, for they are but little places, some of them merely wells round which a hovel or two have grouped themselves. Of old there was little to make the desert change: there were tracks, it is true, along which caravans would sometimes progress, eager enough to be past the barren land without misadventure at the hands of man or of the elements, for a caravan might be rich booty for savage tribesmen who lurked in some fastnesses of the wilds, always on the watch, like the vulture after his prey: and there is little law and less police on the plains, and the dust is the terror that rides on winged winds. The old tracks are marked out that all may see by bones, bones of camels and mules which have fallen by the way, scraps of cloth and leather dropped on the route, to be wafted hither and thither and covered up sooner or later by the drifting sand. It

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is a weary and a dry land, where the sun knows how to scorch and the wind how to freeze.

But away to the North is the country of an active race, energetic resourceful men, who send their sons out into the world that they may open up new lands, bringing civilisation to the heathen and profit to themselves—a stern cold land, where the winter nights are long and the snows are deep, where summers are short and few. They are fine fighting men, these Northerners.

And South, beyond the desert and beyond the mountains, is a fair and fertile land, washed by warmer seas. Prosperous and wealthy . . . long peace has made these men fat.

Yes, between this side and that of the desert there is a world of difference.

But time rolls on, civilisation will not stand still, men seek for new countries to exploit: it happens that men look at the desert and wonder what can be done with it. Baffled by it as a hindrance to their spreading borders, they first seek to dodge it. They cross the sea in ships, and, starting from the seaboard, would penetrate southward by that route. They make railways indeed, stretching like tentacles toward the frontier like as some fig-tree spreads its roots to a watercourse; but it is not enough. A railway from the sea is indeed the first stage, but railways are foreordained to join their routes in the end. Stephenson prophesied that the railways of England would all connect when but few and petty iron roads were yet projected, and what Stephenson foresaw for England then, we may now foretell for other less populated places.

For a while the politicians talk very loud, misunderstanding one another with many words. And at last they make a writing, and sign it and seal it with many seals, and there is calm again. And the desert keeps its secrets.

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But the railway cries aloud for traffic—for traffic in peace perhaps, for traffic in war certainly. Inspired correspondents begin to write knowing articles about “The Linking-up of the Transmarine Railway” and the great commercial advantages to result from such an international investment. Others, signing themselves ‘Cassandra’ or something equally suitable, prophesy darkly of the drawing together of frontiers, the extended Frontier policy and the Day of Armageddon. But these are but thunders round Olympus, a rumbling far above the head of the man in the street, that man to whom Governments have become wont to truckle.

And last, the Engineer. He has steadfastly regarded the map. He has been measuring and calculating. After the times of talking and writing his day comes. His it is to bridge the desert, to join the two electrically charged bodies so that a current may flow between them. Does he persuade or is he commanded by those who sit in high places. Who knows? These are matters of high import.

Finally, the Ruler of the North says, “Let it be made”; and forthwith go forth men—the surveyor with his levels, his staves, his chains, his theodolite; his little party, like a small caravan, moving a dot-and-go-one passage across the barrenness. Then a pause—months, while calculations are made, men are collected, organisation is perfected and great trees are being cut down for sleepers and bridge timbers somewhere half a continent away; rails are being rolled, girders and steel work prepared, engines and rolling-stock are building. Stacks of stores, offices and houses are arising at what is to be the breaking-off point of the new line; storekeepers are busy sorting, arranging, checking.

All is ready now, the pegs have been driven marking the centre line, the cut and fill. Formation gangs descend

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in vast camps upon the desert, construction parties follow, and, close behind, the train crawls forward like a great centipede with a busy swarm of flies round it, as if it were pushing its path in front, and stretching behind is the shining ribbon of the new steel track.

II.

To the southward, spreading over many miles, is the Position. A great Army occupies it, seemingly dormant, like a giant resting after strife. For the Army has pushed forward rapidly, rolling back the enemy's hastily gathered forces, but never bringing them to a stand till now. Yes, pushed forward until the chain of its communications along the line is a heavy one, and it must even wait a while gathering strength; for the enemy is mobile—he has been playing a waiting game, drawing back to a gradual concentration. The Army's Commander is not yet ready to launch his forces to a decisive blow. The foe whom the politicians thought so unready has also collected an Army that will not be brushed aside; and the forces face one another now, like fighters sparring for an opening.

Here, at the head of the lines of communication, it seems as if we were in a railway goods-yard, and, in fact, it is little different, except that goods-yards are wont to be near large towns. Those things which loom bulkily in the dusk, like warehouses, are stacks of forage and piles of boxes, bales and timber, machinery and what not. That building from which a glint of fire shows is a running shed.

Furthermore, the roads have been laid somewhat hastily, and the 'boxing' which usually fills up to sleeper level is not there. In fact, it is not good walking between the tracks.

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At the end of the fan of sidings, moving to and fro in the dusk, a locomotive is busy ; now and again you hear the bump-clink, bump-clink of shunted trucks and the rhythmic snort of the shunting-engine as she sorts out the empty waggons and sends the loaded ones to their appointed places—Supplies, Ordnance, Engineer Stores, Baggage, Medical Comforts. . . .

The light is not over-good, and I should not recommend you to try and pick your way about the sidings without a guide ; the men have only a few lanterns to do their work by ; besides, there are sentries. That light you see dodging, halting at intervals and going on again, is the lantern by which the number-taker is doing his work—a purposeless sort of job it might seem, this business of lifting up tarpaulins and taking down numbers in a book, just part of the routine business that seems far removed from the glamour of war.

No houses, did I say ? Stay, here are one or two shanties, and inhabited. To judge by the constant tic-tac which permeates the air round it, one of them is a telegraph-office, and a busy one too.

Let us look inside the larger hut. It is scantily furnished : a stove, a table, a couple of chairs, some papers pinned to the wall—one of them, a ruled diagram, across which a red wriggly line meanders, is marked at the top ' Train Despatches '—a hanging lamp flooding the room with a yellow glare.

A youngish officer is seated at the table, his khaki forage-cap pushed back from his forehead : his age seems about thirty, but his arm bears the stripes of a Lieut.-Colonel : there is something of the bulldog in his expression : his face is a bit drawn and lined. Railway responsibilities are heavy.

He is examining some papers, some sort of tabulated

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statements ; a pile of telegrams lies near by, and a number of letters and documents are ranged at the back of the table in orderly heaps. Presently he calls to a brother officer working in an adjoining room, who comes in at the summons.

"Look here, Jessop, something's got to be done to release trucks. It seems to me that there are a tremendous lot standing under load at some of the dépôts. You know yourself that it simply paralyses traffic to have all those locked up. Can't you keep them moving?"

"Yes," says the other, "it does look bad ; but with these constant shifts of dépôts it's very hard to get the supply johnnies to clear them."

"Well, if *they* won't clear them, you must simply tell your officers to get the stuff heaved off. We can't run the show unless station work is kept going smartly. Have you taken it up with D. of S. ? . . . Oh, here's the very man we want !"

And indeed as he spoke another elderly officer had come in. Heavily built, he walked somewhat stiffly and with an air of some importance. The badges on his arm showed full Colonel's rank, and the array of medal-ribbons across his chest spoke of many campaigns.

"The old story, Milray," said the new-comer, with a heartiness which seemed a little forced, "Trucks !" He paused a little, as if for effect. Had he not earned distinction on ' the Boards,' and not lost the trick yet !

"My people at the Base," he went on, "are complaining that they can't complete my indents unless you give them more truck space. Can't feed the Army without, you know. I just came across to see what you could do."

"My dear Colonel," responded the other, "I rather think it's you whom I have to ask to make an effort. If your people would only unload what they've got more

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smartly we should have available all those which are shown in this report as standing under load—I've been just talking to Jessop about it—we should be sending down empties as fast as they could deal with them. Jessop will bear me out. . . . Oh, yes, I know you'll say that you will need the stuff later on : why you haven't unloaded it is that it isn't exactly what you want at the moment, eh? My dear sir, that isn't the way to run a railway : a railway's a machine which won't work clogged up. Every single truck which is kept standing under load means one less going back to fill up."

"I suppose there is something in what you say ; but I'm short of labour for unloading."

"Oh, if that's all, I'll have them unloaded fast enough. Jessop, you will note that. You can fix up to get any labour you need."

Major Jessop nodded, he was thinking out a distribution of labour gangs, and added, "We'd better send some gangs down to-morrow."

"And then," said the Director of Supplies, returning to the charge, "what about tarpaulins? We can't send forage uncovered, you know."

"That is your own affair again," snapped the Director of Railways. "If your people wouldn't let the sheets be taken to make bivouacs——"

The telephone bell rang opportunely.

"Excuse me a moment," said Milray, "here's Thompson asking if he can see me about stores. We're in a hurry to get some demands made out. By-the-bye, how many trucks a-day did you say it took to feed the Army? Now I come to think of it, the average despatches aren't so bad!"

"Well, I suppose I must make the best of it," murmured the man of provisions in a hurt tone. "But of course I must tell the Chief."

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He went out.

"You understand, Jessop. Things must be kept moving at all costs. I daresay Harpe wants to have a movable supply depôt, and will talk big about his readiness for everything, but we know different. I think I'll make a dart across and see the Chief myself."

The Commander-in-Chief's house was not far away: it possessed the distinction of having the only tree in the neighbourhood by way of a shade and hitching-post for horses. It was a tumbledown white stone building, with a cluster of huts in rear, now used as quarters for Staff and attendants. There was a good-sized anteroom, in the dim light of which two or three officers were waiting. One of them came forward as the new-comer entered. "Pow-wow on inside. Chief wants you, Milray," said he. Milray passed in quietly, and opened the door into the General's sanctum. A number of officers were standing there—indeed no one was sitting except Godsall, the Chief's confidential assistant, who was seated at a small table apparently taking notes. A large map was spread on the window table, and a lamp stood on one corner of it.

The Chief strode up and down the room, addressing now one officer and now another—a grey man, you would say, at first impression: indeed his hair was silvery enough; but the spring of his step and something tigerish in his mien inspired awe. In truth, Heckmondwyke, a leader of extraordinarily brilliant and painstaking intellect, was at times very irritable, for campaigning had damaged his digestion, and, although he had great self-control, he found it difficult to prevent his inward irritation reacting on his manner now and again. His Staff found it well to know their business.

"'Intelligence' here," he was saying, "tells me that

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his reports all indicate that a small force has got away somewhere round our right, and is moving towards the line. *I think at that rate they must make for the river—see here on the map—because that is the only place they can fill up with water——*”

“There’s another reason,” broke in Milray—“there’s a big timber bridge on the railway, and it isn’t over well guarded.”

“We’ve been going into that. I intend to send a strong force down the line to move out parallel to the river and sweep the country in that direction. I want you railway people to make arrangements at once for entraining them. Godsall will give you the numbers.”

“I must have any trucks I find necessary cleared of supplies and stores. If you’ll approve of that, we can make ready to despatch the first train in an hour or two. I’ll give orders at once.”

Milray did not wait. This move would in one way greatly assist his plans. It would be a good reason for getting trucks unloaded, and once they were cleared, the current of empties to the base would be re-established and the circulation of the line be by so much improved. But a sudden move is a large order. The line had been working to its full capacity, engines were scarce and many of them needing repair, staff had to be kept on long hours. All that was nothing, however, compared to the risk to the big timber bridge. It was the weak spot in the chain connecting the Army across the desert to its Base, and no one realised that better than Milray. True, he had girders and plant in plenty, but none of them had reached railhead yet.

Revolving these things in his mind, he came to his office again. Jessop was awaiting him.

“We’ve got to take on a good-sized move of troops

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down to the big bridge, and to be ready *ek dum*. You had better have everything heaved out. Harpe and his little lot can go to blazes till this job's done. Fix it up with the loco and traffic at once to make ready for despatching, say, a dozen trains before morning. They'd better put the first lot of empties they can grab alongside the loading bank straight off."

"Put them off at the siding this side of the river, I suppose?" queried Jessop. "Pity they couldn't choose a place with some sort of lay-out to move to. There's only a little bit of a platform, and it'll be a toughish job if you want to keep the up-traffic going too: and, by Jingo, we *must* get the up-trains through, or we shan't have engines. I'd better send a special officer."

"You'd better do the smartest you can, or the Chief will have all our heads off."

"Well, I'll send Farquhar. He doesn't go to sleep anyway."

"You'll need something to light up the place."

"Oh, that's all right. We've got plenty Wells lights from the construction train. Pity there's no time to send that out and get a siding thrown down."

"And remember the watchwords," wound up Milray. "'Throw 'em out!' and 'Don't let 'em have it!'" There is *no* time for delays, so you must absolutely take hold and hustle."

III.

Than a railway siding in the middle of the desert one can hardly imagine a more dreary place. The rails come from one horizon and stretch like two straight-edges to the other, unvaried save by the loop in which one train would stand while another passed. Arthur siding had begun its career simply as such a passing-place on the main

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line ; no station, not even a raised water-tank in the midst of the waste : just a name-board and nothing more, you might say—it had been christened after one of the engineers like Henry and Charles sidings farther along. Birthday siding was called so because the Director's birthday had happened on the day when that point was reached.

In recent days, however, Arthur had increased in importance, a little hut had been dumped down by the way-side and some telegraph wires led into it. Then the working party went away, and a silent bony man came to take up his quarters there. The foreman at Arthur's was not communicative—inclined to be morose rather : indeed, he had no one to talk to beyond exchanging a passing word with the guard and driver of a train or swapping lies on the wire with the adjacent stations when nothing else was doing. At one time they had talked of sending a small detachment to guard the station, but on second thoughts they reckoned that small detachments were easily 'mopped up,' and Craske for his part was quite serene without any escort. Everything seemed to pass him by. Not long since troop trains had come through frequently enough : now it was usually only long supply trains which went lumbering through, with occasionally a few 'details' sitting enthroned on sacks of oats, drowsing among a litter of accoutrements and baggage.

Things had been very dull for Craske, and all that used to come from the front seemed to be the same message day after day : "Nothing special doing ; traffic stopped to-night ; shove on all you can."

It therefore rather worried him this evening to be stirred up by a wire from the Traffic Manager, addressed OQ (all stations), telling him that a big troop move was ordered—that he might expect about ten trains to unload

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at his station ; that it was important all traffic should be kept moving sharp. But he took it calmly.

The telegram continued that Lieut. Farquhar would accompany first train and would take charge, also concluded with a formula he knew well, "Keep me fully informed." "Guess I'll get a stiff hand with the ticker," he remarked. "Hope that young officer knows a bit about shunting."

Thus it happened that Craske, who reckoned it would be as well to get the telegraph business through as early as he could, so as to leave himself free for outside work, had 'arranged' three trains from the North and two from the South before the real business of the evening commenced. The order forms were all made out : all was ready to hand them to the trains as they came. But he had not calculated how long they would stay. The first train rumbled in, screamed a bit with its brakes as the guard ran along the train and hastily pinned down the levers, wheezed a bit with escaping steam, bumped among the buffers a few times and finally stood still. Farquhar jumped out of the guard's van and ran to the hut.

"Come to give you a hand, station-master," he said cheerily. "I've asked the guard to get his mate to draw up to the platform, and hope that's all right. Any wires for me?"

"Two or three here. There's three trains comin' up before this can go away, you know. Henry's was keen to send 'em on, so I took 'em."

"Golly, there *will* be a block. Life's going to be strenuous to-night, I see. Well, we'll get this lot out anyhow."

Unloading a troop train is far from being the same thing as getting a city and suburban crowd out. To begin with, they are in a pretty mixed assortment of vehicles, box trucks, cattle trucks, battered flats, a timber waggon or

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two, some high steel-sided things intended for grain, some long, some short, some almost newly painted, some half-finished looking affairs snatched from the shops, some weather-beaten old wanderers. The officers are crowded into a box truck and have to be waked, the N.C.O.'s turn out the men, kits are hastily thrown out—to be sorted later on—horses have to be induced on to the little platform, waggons disentangled.

All in the uncertain smoky light of the paraffin flares, which whistle and roar as the sapper in charge pumps air in to get the adjustment right, and cast fantastic shadows, while figures appear and disappear suddenly.

Presently the train is empty, and almost as soon as it is drawn ahead a second has arrived, whistling from behind its headlight like a benighted wayfarer knocking for admittance.

Besides this, two trains have come from the North, and our instructions are imperative to keep traffic moving. They cannot get past, for the siding is long enough to take one train only.

What is to be done ?

It is, in fact, our old friend The Shunting Puzzle, a Christmas diversion in our youth, a very real problem on a railway in war. Given four trains or so on the main line and a siding which will hold one of them only, how to make the two at opposite ends change places ? We have got to do it. Those trains and engines must get away North, these must clear to the South. It is no use vowing to make a better arrangement next time. However, the railway hand has his solution pat. See-saw them !

Of course, see-sawing is simple enough. One train goes into the siding and all the others draw ahead of it. Then it draws out : another backs into the siding, and the two others pass it by, the second pulls out into its

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new position : and the thing's done—till the next train comes.

Childish simple, isn't it ? But it is done quickest by day, with one or two shunters to turn the points and to pass the word to drivers and guards ; it is also simpler when the road is quite level and brakes do not have to be pinned down each time (Arthur's has a nice little falling grade on each side), when drivers are not sleepy and guards a bit out of temper and the station-master a good deal worried by a telegraph ticker which keeps calling AP, AP . . . And time is just what we cannot spare.

Besides, the young Traffic Officer has troubles of his own, and senior officers are apt to be fractious at night. Jessop had said, " You must hustle them. Heave them off the trains, and heave the trains out. All we know or care about is, that the big bridge is in danger unless this column starts quick. . . ." And just here was everything blocked, more trains pouring in and nowhere to put them. What use is patience if there is no time !

It is a nightmare of continuous toil, a spasm of furious unloading and shunting, goading on the men to get themselves out, with their gear, their horses, the guns, the waggons, upon a rickety platform which threatens to collapse : there is a confusion of whistling, shouts of command and bangs of buffers, of couplings clinking and brakes creaking. Then follows the tedious process of shunting and shifting this train away from the platform and bringing another into position. All is varied by complaints from irritable commanding officers, inquiries about the situation and when the other trains containing tools and other impedimenta will arrive, or what is to be done with things which cannot be taken forward—Farquhar politely declines to take charge of them. Telegrams come from the adjacent stations advising more

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troops on the road ; these are in cipher which has to be decoded. Telegrams from headquarters demand how things are progressing, and include instructions to the O.C. force, who has to be found ; these have to be answered immediately if not sooner, and the O.C. wants to wire back complaining of delay. Craske is getting writer's cramp.

A doctor arrives intimating that some men have gone sick and ought to be sent to hospital in a lying-down carriage (and there are only cattle-trucks, all of which must go North).

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At headquarters they are anxious. "Jessop," telephones Godsall, "the Chief is worried about this troop move. The Intelligence men report that force of the enemy's is moving fast round to the north-west. When will the move be through ?"

"It seems to be going all right," replies Jessop ; "everything's despatched, but the detraining reports come in slowly. They'll be fairly bunged up with detraining work anyway, and any wires I may send will merely flurry them. You'd better tell the Chief we're doing our best."

Inarticulate murmurs from Godsall. The Chief is scanning the map, measuring again and again from the bridge along the river. "If only we knew anything for certain !" he says.

.
"These doctors always want the impossible," mutters Farquhar, and aloud, "Just wait a minute." For at this moment a grimy man has appeared at the station-hut doorway. He is the engine-driver of the third train from the South. His engine is failing for want of water, which he ought to have taken at the bridge, but the

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tank was dry at the moment, and they told him to push on.

Deadlock if this engine is not filled up, for he is now in the middle of the puzzle, and unless the trains can be moved about the cavalry cannot be got alongside the platform, still less can the trucks be shifted so as to unload one by one. The Colonel is fuming. He has already all but put the guard under arrest, and wants to know when this damn-foolishness is going to be finished so that his horses can get out. He has gone in search of the O.C. troops, thank goodness.

"There's my station tank," says Craske, "they filled it yesterday, but it'll be a long job with buckets."

"Yes, and the Lord knows how long a fatigue party will take. Delay anyway. Some people are born fools. Now if we had a pump!"

Doctor to the rescue. This doctor, keen fellow, grasps the difficulty at once, bethinks himself of patterns of pump he knows, and finally makes offer of the pump of his sterilising apparatus. Now, this sterilising apparatus is a new and elaborate affair, intended for the supply of pure water to troops on the line of march, and as an army on the line of march is a mighty thirsty organism, and, moreover, won't wait to have its thirst quenched, but will drink anything sooner than wait, the capacity of the pump on the apparatus has to be considerable. It is, in fact, the very thing, and luckily has a suction hose of sufficient length. The delivery presents a difficulty, but finally, after blocking it up on some ammunition boxes, that difficulty is overcome; the tender is filled up enough to last for a while anyway, and the danger of breakdown is warded off.

But all this takes precious time: we work harder than ever to get the trains cleared. The roaring flares illumine

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a scene of hasty but methodical toil, for the procedure of each train has been almost reduced to a formula, and if it were not for the interruptions and the little things which will go wrong, all were well.

A nightmare job: thank Heaven, it comes to an end at last. Farquhar is grimy and dusty, his voice is hoarse, and he feels his eyes burn; but once the troops are off the trains he cares no more about them. He has passed on the messages to the Commanding Officer, who, by-the-bye, has commandeered some of the scanty space of the station-hut to compose his orders in, but has at last gone. With his departure Craske seems calmer.

Farquhar stands on the platform a moment: over there that dark mass, where a few lights twinkle about and an occasional jingle of harness varies the low hum of conversation, that is the main body of the force; the advanced troops have marched off, and the remainder is following immediately. The trains stretch along the line, a shadowy mass melting away into the darkness, except where engine fires throw a smoky glow towards the sky. He steps wearily off the stage and walks towards the station. His telegram announcing completion can be sent at once.

"Are you ready to send off those two down trains, Craske?"

"Yes, sir; only I'm waiting to get the line clear. I can't get Henry on the wire just this moment—had 'em a few minutes ago. I'm afraid there's a fault, and I reckon we didn't ought to use a telegraph failed order unless it can't be helped. There's no up train to come in after, so far as I know."

"Oh, well, I suppose I might almost go and turn in myself. Still, we might get a completion report through to headquarters: the boss won't care what happens if this move has finished all right. I think I'll doss down here

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if you don't mind. I left my flea-bag off somewhere near this house when I came, and if nobody boned it I can make ready pretty quick."

He stands at the door a moment looking round. The night is calm and gloomy: to the east there is just a suspicion of colour, a foretaste of the dawn. All is silent but for the hissing of steam from a leaky injector and the occasional creak of a timber in one of the waggon.

IV.

It is almost dark still, but a dim twilight is spreading, and by degrees developing into a cold grey dawn over the desert, like a rather under-exposed photographic plate. The air is chill with the sharp frostiness of night, and the mounted scout shivers a little as he advances cautiously across the stony plain—has he not been taught that the half-hour or so before the dawn is just the favourite time for surprises? He is weary. Who would not be tired after having drearily groped his way for half the night across this supremely featureless country? It was bad enough to be turned out of the truck in which he and his comrades were ensconced, hard enough lying, but at any rate warm with a tarpaulin closing in the top so as to reduce the ventilation to a minimum; to be turned out—hustled out into pitchy darkness fitfully illumined by lanterns hurrying to and fro (for the flares were at the platform only), amidst the banging of trucks and shouts of command. Half awake, he had collected his horse and kit; almost before he was thoroughly awake he found himself detailed as one of the advanced-guard scouts.

They had been slowly picking their way forward, halting now and then to verify their bearings. Most of

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the time they had been moving west. He wondered when they would halt.

Hullo! that must be the sun coming up; there is a glow vaguely spreading from beyond the edge of the darkness—a smoky redness tinting a section of the distance. The pictorial effect of it hardly appeals to him—he simply feels glad that it will soon be light. Perhaps they will soon come to a halt, or the advanced-guard will be relieved.

The word is passed to push on more quickly: he can see his right and left hand men more distinctly now, and is conscious of the greater confidence which comes of moving in company. No longer do vague terrific shapes seem to loom up out of the darkness to meet his straining eyes. The glow is becoming quite pronounced and the light is spreading wider across the sky.

The country changes—we are no longer moving across dry powdery ground where such remnants of grass as there are have been burnt to tinder by harsh suns, it is more rocky, but there are occasional traces of vegetation and even a dusty bush or two—be careful now, bushes might easily give cover to some sniper lying in wait for the unwary!

There is a cleft in the ground, a dry nullah. We must be coming to something in the way of a watercourse. The scout lifts his hand in warning. A little farther, and we come to a deep ravine. We work along the edge, for, as if some mighty plough had been driven through the land, a declivity plunges down to the stony bed where, at the melting of the snows in far off mountains, the great river whirls a muddy torrent. The sides are precipitous, irregular, curved and bitten fantastically by the swirling torrent, now reduced to a mere thread through the pools deep down in the shadows of the chasm.

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The advanced line moves to its right, feeling along the rim for a practicable descent: the channel turns and twists about, for the course meanders as if the Maker of things had marked it out carelessly when he was planning this forgotten corner.

At last a halt. We have turned a curve. We look along the valley, and all is explained.

The scene is full of smoke—a curtain stretches across the valley, rent here and there as an idle eddy of wind turns it aside: beyond is a glowing inferno of hot embers from which a tongue of flame darts up now and again. The trestles must have caught and burnt up like a box of matches—a few more solid timbers stick up drunkenly out of the heap, rails are looped in festoons with some hard-wood sleepers hanging on to them, a steel tie or two projects like a black thread from the sea of glowing embers.

We have reached the bridge, but the enemy have been too swift for us.

The race is over. The raiders have done their task, and done it well, for the big bridge is down and a gap sunders the Army from its Base.

The Commander-in-Chief will be pretty savage, but he knows that it is only one point in the match which has been scored to the other side.

And Milray? Milray will laugh.

VII.

A RETURN TO DISCIPLINE.

ON a burning day in the early Indian summer of 1857 a man lay dying of cholera. He had passed through the stages of cramping agony, and, worn out by the horrible course of the disease, he lay in a state of collapse, unable to move, and hardly capable of thought. The room was silent except for the persistent buzzing of the mosquitoes, which pierced the sick man's head like a knife; the punkah hung idle from the roof; there was not a soul there to minister to his wants. He dimly wondered what he had done that he should be condemned to suffer the appalling thirst that parched him, to bear the sickening heat that crushed the little that remained of his vitality. In his comatose state he did not realise that it was curious that there was no coolie to pull the punkah, that no doctor stood by his bedside, that his servants had left him; and yet he had a distant indistinct recollection of being taken ill a few hours earlier, of being put to bed by the doctor, of being tended by his servants. But now his power of reasoning was almost gone, and he was but aware of the burning, splitting ache in his head, of the chill numbness of his legs, of the torturing thirst and of a feeling of absolute collapse. He closed his eyes and wondered how long it was to last.

There was but little doubt that Captain Anderson of the —th Light Cavalry was dying—not only dying of

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cholera, but dying with no one to soften the cruel manner of his death. And yet when cholera had seized him early that morning, he had had all the attendance and every alleviation that were possible. But in the meantime the Mutiny had broken out.

While he had lain struggling in the first throes of his sickness, unconscious of everything save the agony that held him, the sound of heavy firing from the mess, where his brother-officers were at breakfast, had caused the doctor to rush from his bedside, anxious to ascertain the reason of the disturbance ; and no sooner had the latter entered the mess compound than he had shared the fate of the other British officers of the regiment, who had been shot by the mutineers as they sat in the mess-room.

The looting of the mess plate and furniture, and the firing of the bungalow, had distracted the thoughts of the mutineers from Anderson ; but when there was breathing-space from the work in hand, Rissaldar Sikandar Khan remembered that the British officer who commanded his squadron had not been among the sahibs already murdered. " Oh, brothers, where is Anderson Sahib ? Has he fled, or is he sitting in his bungalow ? Him, too, let us search for and slay, for not till then will the regiment be clean of unbelievers." His speech was answered by a yell from the sowars, and a rush was made toward the sick man's bungalow—a rush only to be checked by Anderson's sweeper, who stopped the leaders with a warning of cholera. This gave them pause ; but after a hasty consultation they decided to continue their advance more cautiously, and to shoot their victim from the verandah, without entering the sick-room, for they feared infection, and their cowardice was as great as their treachery.

Lying motionless, in a lethargy that affected mind as

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well as body, without sufficient strength even to brush away the flies that buzzed around his head and settled upon him with tormenting persistence, Anderson became dimly aware of the sound of footsteps, of the loud noise of voices, of a shuffling on the verandah, then of a dominant voice raised above the others, and again of the same voice speaking alone in strident tones—tones which bored through his head like a gimlet, but which conveyed nothing to his brain. Gradually the meaning of the words formed itself in his mind, which grasped their sense as in an indistinct dream, and without appreciating the fact that it was to him they were addressed.

“Ho, soor, arise and show thyself, that we may shoot thee. Oh, honourless one, thy fellow-sahibs, devil-people, are dead, and thou too art about to die. The son of a pig hears not, brothers; without doubt, owing to the sickness he has become without sense. Nay, shoot not, fool; we will arouse him, and observe how his heart becomes small when he hears of the work that has been toward.”

The harsh voice and its insolent tones gradually roused the dormant mind of the sick man: he was struggling to understand, but still he lay with his sunken eyes fixed upon the motionless punkah above him. How the flies worried and distracted him! “Ah, Janwar, beast, the rule of the sahibs is over; rissala and pultan have arisen, and the land is again ours. Heardst thou not the firing, Shaitan? That meant the death of thy brothers, who will be eaten this night by dogs and jackals. Thinkest thou that thou shalt escape by reason of thy sickness? Nay, the young men of thine own squadron shall slay thee, son of a dog, standing afar off, lest evil accrue from thy uncleanness, soor.”

The malignant insolent voice ceased, and at last Ander-

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son understood : it was to him the voice was speaking, the voice of Sikandar Khan, his own trusted native officer, who was now heaping on him the abuse and filthy insults of the East, who had helped in the murder of his brother-officers, who was false to the Sirkar. He struggled to realise the meaning of it all. Then suddenly it flashed upon him—the warnings of impending trouble, whispered in fear a few days earlier and scoffed at in derision, had become justified. The mysterious story of the chupatti sent from Meerut was true—the native troops had really risen. Oh, how parched he was !

And now his mind worked as lucidly as before it had been paralysed. He slowly turned his head on the pillow and looked at the mutineers crowding the verandah.

“ Ho ! he wakes. Load, brothers ! ”

Anderson strove to speak, the apple in his throat working convulsively ; but it was cruelly difficult to force the words from his burning lips and swollen tongue, and the obvious effort was perceived and received with taunts of fear.

A moment's interval, and then the words came ; and the waiting crowd were held silent and still by the magnetism of the voice—at first weak and small, then gradually strengthening and increasing in volume till every man wondered how a body so stricken could have a voice so great, till, again, finally wonder ceased, and they were held in the grip of superstitious fear.

His mind strong, but his body consumed with weakness, Anderson spoke to them as he lay, rebuking them for their disloyalty to the Raj, for falseness to the salt that they had eaten, for the treacherous murder of their officers. Pale as death, and sweating with the effort of speech, he lashed them with his tongue ; and no man dared interrupt the fluent stream of Hindustanee that poured

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from his lips, every word a sting, every sentence a whip, as he jeered at the folly of their pretensions, derided them as cowards, and again cursed them for their treachery. Then his voice suddenly broke, and, as he lay panting for breath, the native officer, livid with rage and fear, opened his mouth to speak, only to be silenced by the dominant eye of the dying man, who after a few moments again spoke. "As for you, Sikandar Khan, whom I have always treated as a friend, and you, oh men of my squadron, whom I have always treated with justice and with kindness, favouring no man more than another—as for you, you shall not know peace in life or in death. Hunted you shall be, fleeing daily from place to place, ever vainly seeking refuge from the sahib-log, and when caught you shall be hanged by sweepers; dead, you will go down into Jehannum, but even in that fire of hell you shall not burn in peace, for you have not left me to die in peace. Now this, then, is my order to you: If ever and whenever men of this regiment sicken of cholera, then shall you rise up from Jehannum and you shall find escort for every sowar, uhdedar and sirdar, for every trooper, non-commissioned officer and native officer who dies of the sickness. You shall be on duty while the disease lasts; and this shall be your duty—to summon each dying man, and to escort his soul to its appointed place."

With a convulsive effort he raised himself into a sitting posture, and the men shrank back from the ghastly face with its burning eyes, and from the superhuman strength that enabled a man dying of cholera to lift himself unaided. Then with a cry of "Sunno, yih' hamara hukm hai, mahno" ("Attend, that is my order—obey it"), he fell back dead.

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In the year of grace 1903, and in the month of July, a regiment of native cavalry lay in cholera camp: the sweltering brown plain was dotted with the four camps of the four squadrons, each placed where a good well and a little shade were available; the orderly lines of the sowars' tents dazzled the eye with their glistening whiteness, and the ground shimmered with the dancing heat-haze; the rows of picketed horses stood languidly in the fierce glare of the sun, their heads drooping, almost too listless to whisk away the flies with their tails, while their masters, stretched on charpoys wherever a little shade offered, tried to doze away the appalling heat of the day. Not a sound was to be heard save the occasional shuffle of a fidgeting horse and the drowsy creaking of a Persian well-wheel, which, as the slow oxen turned it, seemed to be making its complaint at having to draw water in such heat. The sentry, placed over the well to see that no unauthorised person or unclean bucket had access to its cool depths, walked slowly to and fro at his post, wishing that his relief would come, and suddenly stiffened to attention as a British officer cantered past in the direction of the hospital. "The sahib goes to see Ameer Khan, and it is better to be on duty than to be sick like him," he reflected, as he turned to resume his beat.

A few hundred yards away under some trees stood a cluster of slightly larger tents of the pattern known as 'General Service,' a single-fly affair offering shade from the sun, but scant shelter from the heat. In one of these a little group of men stood round the charpoy on which Ameer Khan was stretched; a thermometer hanging from one of the bamboo tent-poles registered the temperature at 115°; and the silence here too was as perceptible as the heat. On the ground was a basin of disinfectant fluid.

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The sick man's drinking-pot, engraved with his name in Urdu characters, stood by, while his clothes lay in an untidy heap at the far end of the tent. A small box swaddled in a blanket, and containing ice, was the only thing that denoted the smallest attempt at any comfort, and it, needless to say, had come from the mess, not from the Sirkar. Such was the hospital.

Ameer Khan, sick with cholera, lay motionless on his string-woven charpoy, the sunken cheeks and the eyes, that had receded into their sockets, giving him the appearance of one who has been ill for days rather than for a few hours. An attendant was mechanically hand-rubbing his numbed legs, and a comrade enlisted from the same far-away border village in the Eusufzai was slowly fanning his face, his own hawk-like Pathan countenance remaining perfectly immobile and giving no clue to the kindly feelings that prompted his action. At the foot of the bed was the patient's squadron commander, the only Englishman present. Presently he whispered to the grey-bearded old hospital assistant, who with down-turned eyes was gently feeling the patient's pulse, "How do you think he is doing now, Fazl Ellahi?"

"His pulse is very weak, your honour," answered the old man in English; then turning to the sick man he hastily added in cheerful tones, "Gebrayo mat, jawan, tukra ho jaenge" ("Don't be afraid, my lad, you will get well").

Ameer Khan slowly opened his heavy-lidded eyes, and his lips framed the word 'pani' (water), the desire being guessed rather than heard, so weak was the whisper that framed it.

Fazl Ellahi gently raised the patient's head and held a tin cup of iced soda-water to the parched lips. Drinking a couple of mouthfuls, the man relapsed into lethargy,

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and again there was silence. The gentle swish of the moving fan, the distant creak of the well, a moan from the sick man, the rustle of the Englishman's handkerchief as he wiped his dripping face, were the only sounds that obtruded themselves in the torrid tent.

Suddenly Ameer Khan opened his eyes and said quite distinctly, "Abhi ata, ressaldar sahib" ("I am coming now, ressaldar sahib"), and then with a slight movement of the limbs he died.

A few minutes later they left the tent. The officer asked, "What *does* it mean, Fazl Ellahi? They've all said that."

"Khuda jane" ("God knows"), answered the old man.

VIII.

THE KITE.

“ Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire.”
—*Ecclesiastes.*

I.

THREE dirty and breathless soldiers scrambled painfully through a gap in the hedge on the brow of the rounded slope of the hill, and, taking out their maps and field-glasses, lay down prone on their stomachs. So dirty were they that it was hard to realise that they were officers. Resting both elbows squarely on the ground, to counteract the unsteadiness of hand caused by their heaving bodies, their thumbs were soon busily twisting the focussing-screws as they directed their glasses on to a large patch of scrub away below, some three miles to the west. On a rise in this rough country a long line of intermittent flashes could be seen with the naked eye.

The hedge stretched for some distance along the brow of the hill. About one hundred yards behind, and parallel to it, between hazel hedges, ran a country road. This—hardly more than a lane—was, to the south of this point, sunken, but just here was flush with the ground. On the near side of it, immediately behind where the officers were lying, was an open gate, and close to this gate a young poplar-tree, against which was propped a motor-

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bicycle. In the lane itself were a motor cyclist and a couple of orderlies, dismounted and holding the horses of the party. Down below, in the direction in which the three were gazing, stretched a peaceful panorama of undulating country, fading into a bluish heat-haze in the distance. The different crops gave a many-hued appearance to the landscape, the richer hue of the uncut hay alternating with the still crude green of the young grain and the reddish purple of the beetroot fields. The few fleecy clouds floating lazily in the sky here and there cast vague purple blots, which slowly moved over hill and dale. The white walls and shining roofs of the homesteads dotted about stood out gleaming in the sunlight, and these, with the patches of woodland, caught the eye and assisted in some estimation of distance, otherwise impossible upon the variegated background with its network of hedges.

It was an almost perfect day in early June. Yet, in spite of the brilliant sunshine, there was an oppressive sultriness in the air which gave more than a hint of a coming storm.

Far off, in the same positions they had occupied all day, hung three war-balloons, motionless in the still air. They were of a curious shape, and as the sun glistened on their distended skins they had the appearance of three yellow caterpillars, monstrous and bloated. Upon the youngest of the three men under the hedge they had a disquieting effect of oppression. He felt they were the eyes of the enemy—as indeed they were—and was uneasy under their silent gaze; at times he even imagined that those menacing eyes could read not only his actions but his very thoughts and desires.

Though the elements seemed yet at peace, there was clear evidence that man was not, for here and there could

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be seen the angry glow of a conflagration with its pall of black smoke. In places the dirty-white dust-clouds betrayed the movement of masses, though the masses were not visible, while over certain spots thick clusters of smoke-puffs, suddenly breaking out like an ensign from the halliards of a ship, showed where shrapnel shell were raining down destruction. These puffs were of different colours—the majority pure white, but others were of a purple and magenta hue as violent as aniline dyes. An occasional bright flash, followed by a dull detonation and an upshooting trefoil of black smoke, marked the fall of high-explosive shell. From the clamour that filled the air, one might have imagined that the whole countryside formed one large shipyard or boilermaker's shop, so metallic was the sound of musketry close at hand. Every moment this body of sound was stabbed by the nearer rifle-shots which rang out separately, and broken by the occasional throb of machine-guns, the mechanical beat of pompoms and the booming of artillery. But to an ear used to the noise of battles there was one fresh sound—that of the quick-firing field-guns; for as they seized some fleeting occasion to pour out their squalls of shell, individual shots could not be distinguished in the continuous roar.

Notwithstanding this din in the air, it was difficult to see any signs of life. Of the work of man there was ample evidence; but of man himself—save those on the hill—there was no trace. Had a curious observer, however, walked some way down the bellying slope of the hill, he would have seen the backs of a long line of infantry digging for dear life near the bottom.

From all this turmoil down below, the little group at the top of the hill seemed strangely detached. No shell flew screeching over their heads, no bullet sang near

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them—they gazed on undisturbed. At last one put down his glasses and sat up with a grunt.

"We've been looking at the wrong place all along. We've been watching their flashes and bluff trenches on that rise. The guns are using flameless powder, and are a good deal closer—more to the left of the rough. I can just make them out, but cannot see how many there are."

"I can't see anything except the flashes which appear just where the trenches are," replied a second.

"Yes, of course, that's their game! D'you see that red and white farm?"

"Yes."

"Above that there's some water."

"Yes."

"Above that, still more to the left, on that hump covered with——"

"Yes, yes, I have them now; I should say there were more than twenty. They don't seem to be entrenched either; but it is hard to tell on that background."

"There are more like thirty guns there," continued the first. "You may be certain they're entrenched—they're no fools. They have shown the dummies and hidden the real trenches, which would not require much work on such a place as that—an ideal place."

"And so is this," added the third, the youngest of the three. "If it were not for their balloons, we could get a whole brigade of guns up here unseen all the way, and suddenly open fire from behind this hedge. Even if they are entrenched, we could enfilade them and give them a bad time—enough to keep them quiet. If they're not, Lord help them, once we start!" He chuckled softly, and muttered fervently to himself, "Yes, Lord help them!" He was a gunner.

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He stared for a minute at the nearest balloon, silently and in deep thought, then taking off his hat, began absently to mop his head. Suddenly he stopped quite still, his head turned to one side as if listening.

"My God ! it *is* rising !"

The two gazed at him in blank amaze, and, startled, at once seized their repeating-pistols.

"The wind, I mean—the wind. I feel it on my damp head !"

They still looked blank.

"Don't you see ? If the wind only rises, down go those cursed balloons, and then——" There was no need to finish the sentence. The others jumped to their feet ; one sucked his finger and held it up ; the other picked a puff-ball and threw it in the air ; all watched it gently wafted up the hill.

"Yes, look over there ; that's more than haze—it's cloud !"

Towards the west there was now a low bank of grey cloud stretched across the horizon, against which the intermittent flashes showed bright.

"Whistle up the cyclist !" snapped out the eldest of the three, sitting down with notebook and pencil.

As the cyclist came up, he said, "Take this as quick as possible to the general of the 10th Division : he must be found ; but if on the way you get near the officer commanding the Corps Artillery, show it to him and say I want him to read it."

After a minute they heard, as they got up, the snort of the motor breasting a rise on their left, and after three minutes there was nothing but the reek of petrol to show that anyone had been on that hill-top.

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II.

The wind has risen with the coming storm, and, above, the white clouds begin to chase each other across the blue sky. Out in the open and on the hill-tops the trees are stricken by gusts of wind which rob the hawthorns of the last of their bloom. In the sheltered valleys is peace and quiet, and under the lee of the hill the sultriness of the whole morning seems to have been concentrated.

The artillery brigade has now been waiting some time in that little hollow lane between the high banks covered with wild-flowers. Long enough to breathe the panting gun-teams, and for some of the gunners to dismount and pluck dog roses, which they have stuck in their hats.

The still air in this little heat-trap, heavy with the smell of horses and the overpowering scent of May-blossom strewn on the ground, combined with the drowsy buzzing of the humble-bees—the gentle murmur of a hot summer's day—has a somnolent effect on all except the animals, as they stand there zigzagged across the lane, the guns and limbers slewed to ease the strain. They present a succession of shiny quivering skins, and tails switching in a vain endeavour to drive off the hovering swarms of flies who divided their attention between the backs of the men and the horses. Though there is no conversation, for the men—here and there chewing a biscuit or taking a sparing drink from their water-bottles—are all tired, yet there is a general air of pleasurable expectancy, for the nature of their present errand is now known to all. It is their first experience of active service, and the event now awaited is to be their baptism of fire. In the minds of the more serious, a slight though vague feeling of apprehension—running like the coloured thread through

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the lay of a rope—adds zest to their suppressed excitement, for many and wonderful have been the yarns going the round of the barrack-rooms as to the powers of the enemy's quick-firing artillery. Here a more phlegmatic man has lit his pipe and wastefully thrown the match away, to burn to the end among the nettles on the bank—a thing which alone is sufficient to show that these are the early days of operations.

How the sun's rays pour down between the trees! How mercilessly they betray, even through the cloud of dust still hanging in the air, a hint of the more unpleasant side of war! The weary and lathered horses, the red and strained faces of the men, their peeled noses, the little runnels made in the grime on their cheeks by the perspiration as it streamed down, the purple sweat-patches in the greenish-yellow uniform. Now and again, as if maliciously to accentuate the contrast between its dainty self and the crowd of men and animals sweating below, a pale butterfly flits aimlessly in and out of the shadows—sometimes nearly, but never quite, settling on a horse or gun.

The windings of the lane only permit a view of some hundred yards of its length at one time; but even this short distance offers an impressive sight. It is apparent, in spite of the dust and dirt, that the greater number of these men—some still on their horses, some standing, and some stretched out on the shady side of the road—are seasoned and in the prime of life; no mere boys, but men in the best sense of the word, sturdy and full-set. Even for gunners they are a fine lot; and during this lull preceding the coming storm, the sight of this little collection of splendid men and horses raises thoughts as to whether any other army in the world can produce their equal. Both men and horses are the last word in

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continuous training and scientific preparation applied to picked material. Not only are they good to look upon, but good to act. From the showy prettiness of a tournament driving competition to the serious business of getting on to the target they excel ; for here at this moment is collected the smartest brigade of field-artillery in the army—and that means, as they think, the smartest brigade in the world. They are armed also with the best guns in the world : there they are one after another slewed at an angle across the narrow road, entirely blocking it with their length. Wicked they look in their dusty greenish paint, with an occasional glint of steel where it has been scraped off. Even to the uninitiated eye these quick-firers have a more venomous air than the simple old guns ; for, with their high wheels and low bodies peering mysteriously from behind their shields, they look like monstrous grasshoppers crouching on the hill. Ugly and lethal-looking, they are the pride of the gunners ; for though he may not talk much about it, never has there been a true gunner who did not love his gun and thrill with the idea of using it.

To those, now a little thoughtful of the legends concerning the enemy's wonderful quick-firing artillery, the sight of their own weapons, whose powers they had so often tested on the practice-grounds, is reassuring. They have the best gun in the world, and at speed of ranging and accuracy of fire they are unequalled. What more ? for are they not going to catch the enemy unawares ? And to be caught unawares by a squall of shrapnel from modern quick-firing guns means extinction.

To the officers, the exact nature of the present task is known, and the possibilities of the occasion better appreciated, for though as yet without personal experience in war, they know to what a pitch all the nations have

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brought their quick-firing artillery, and what is expected from its 'rafales,' 'tir rapide,' 'schnell feuer'—call it what you will—upon an exposed and unsuspecting enemy. They are standing alongside the horses, one feeling his animal's legs, another loosening a girth, but the majority cheerfully talking in little groups.

At last the dreary wait is over, a flag flickers from one hill to the other. "The enemy's balloons are down." With a sigh of relief the order is passed, and the brigade moves on, slowly at first, then breaking into a trot, for its destination is still some way off, and time, tide and the chances for quick-firing artillery wait for no man.

The message has come down from the youngest of the three officers who were making the reconnaissance under the hedge two hours ago. For the past hour he has been watching those malignant balloons from that same spot and whistling for the wind. As the wind has risen so have his spirits. It is a difficult thing to gauge the height of an object in the air, and several times he has thought that the balloon nearest the enemy's guns seems lower than it was, only to find out he is wrong.

The cloud-bank to the west grows larger, and as its ragged edge creeps up over the blue sky, the dark background shows up the shining balloons all the more brilliantly. The two farthest off are coming down—there is no doubt about it—and at last the nearer one seems lower. Yes, it is! Down, down it sinks. When it is quite close to the ground he waves to a signaller behind the road, who passes on the message, and so back it goes to the waiting brigade.

He crawls behind the hedge, to watch, for a moment, the range-takers, who have been up here for the past half-hour, and who have taken and checked and re-checked the range to the enemy's guns. Some men with

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tools also, who have uprooted the gate-posts and widened the opening from the lane on to the hill-top, are now cutting little windows through the hedge on the brow. A few officers arrive ahead of the batteries, and to these he points out their positions and the target and range.

All is ready for the *coup*, and the head of the column is even now jangling up the hill.

III.

The same landscape as watched by the three under the hedge, but viewed from the other side. In the foreground, half hidden among the patches of gorse and whin on a gentle slope, is a long irregular line of perhaps thirty guns. It is difficult even at this short distance to count their number, for they are dotted about here and there amongst the clumps of cover. Though of a greyer hue, they have a strong family resemblance to those others resting in the little lane on the hillside. By each is a water-bucket, the purpose of which is shown by the damp earth round the gun and the absence of dust. Alongside also are little shelter-pits dug for the gun detachments, the bright yellow of the freshly turned earth artfully concealed with pieces of bush. The guns, the limbers and the very horses themselves—over there in the rear—are embowered in greenery. To the observer, the incongruous Jack-in-the-Green appearance thus given to these engines of destruction seems at first ill-timed foolery. It strikes a jarring note, as does laughter in the presence of death. Overhead, to one side of the line of guns, a huge yellow balloon sways in the rising wind and strains at the cable which slants away down to a small collection of waggons in a convenient hollow.

To the general din of battle all round is periodically

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added the roar of a section of the guns in the line as a target worthy of a 'rafale' of shell is found. The paroxysms of noise indulged in at intervals by these quick-firers are the only sign they give of their action, for they neither belch out flame nor kick up dust. Each fresh outburst seems to call up an echo from the direction of some absurdly ill-concealed earthworks about half a mile to the rear. The enemy are shooting badly, for few shells fall near the guns, though many pass over with a shriek to burst in the neighbourhood of those conspicuous earthworks, whose parapet must be a very shell trap, so continuous are the explosions on it. An occasional heavy shell rumbles up from the south, and, passing over with the noise of an electric tram, detonates in a fountain of yellow earth near the same target.

Step across with me for a moment and examine this focus of explosions. You will find a number of men sitting at the bottom of deep pits, and from their occupation it is plain that not all the explosions so close to them are caused by the hostile shell, for they are busily employed in setting off flash bombs just outside their yellow parapet whenever their own guns fire. As two more shrapnel from different directions whistle high above the much decorated guns and burst just over the pits, it is clear that the latter are the targets aimed at.

Now you will understand the method in the madness of the troglodytes in their pits and the other stage effects.

Some little way from his guns is a dried-up saturnine sort of man, dirty and anything but smart—the commander of the artillery. He is talking to a staff officer, with occasional pauses as he stoops to gaze through a telescope mounted on a tripod, not to the south—the direction in which his guns are firing—but towards the hills to the east. Close by sits another officer at a field

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telephone in a small pit ; such work is at the present moment too important for an orderly. From the instrument a cable, sagging from one bush to another in loops, leads towards the waggons near the balloon anchorage : this cable is the nerve leading from the eye up aloft to the nerve centre below. A few soldiers are sitting about. So close is this little group that it is easy to see that not only do they wear a different uniform from those other gunners now perspiring on that hillside, but that they are of a different race.

The commander again takes a long look towards the hills where something seems to excite his apprehension, for he converses earnestly with the staff officer. After a moment's conference, the latter beckons up an orderly to whom he gives a message, with the result that four range-finders commence to take the range of the poplar-tree, the top half of which is visible above that hill on the east. The wind increases.

The distant balloons are already gradually descending, and a message shortly comes down from the observer above that it is too windy to remain up. The word is given, and slowly the great balloon is hauled down to the depression near the waggons, where it is practically hidden, its approach to the ground being the occasion of special attentions from the enemy. Here, like Gulliver among the Lilliputians, it is seized by many hands and bound down. Hardly has it nestled, with much heaving of billowy sides, into its hollow, when the eye is attracted by something dancing up and down among the brush-wood. It is an oblong framework, partially covered with dirty grey canvas, which has commenced to make sundry abortive little swoops up into the air, ending in abrupt dives down again to earth. Finally this weird kite—for kite it is—makes up its mind and sails steadily upwards

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to the tune of its whining cable drum. Up, up it goes, holding well in the strong breeze till it becomes a mere speck in the sky. Another kite follows, then another, and again one more, threaded on the same cable, till with the combined pull it is stretched as taut as a piano wire, and hums in the breeze like the weather mainstay of a racing yacht.

The commander walks over to the starting-point of the kites, where, sitting near an exaggerated dirty-clothes basket, is a young officer. He is unshaven, and his face is pale and drawn; he appears worn out as he sips slowly from the cup of his flask, but as his senior approaches, he rises, salutes and listens attentively to his somewhat lengthy instructions. He is an exceptionally slight man, and his general air of fatigue is explained by the fact that he has been observing from the balloon for the past three hours: the dark rings under his eyes show where the constant strain has most told. In spite of this he is again to go up in the kite, not because there is none other capable, but because the advantage of having up aloft a pair of eyes that already know the lie of the country is at the present juncture of greater importance than the fatigue of any man. As the commander concludes, a badly fuzed shell bursts on the ground close to him, covering him with sand. He does not pause to shake the sand off, but finishes his sentence—"Of course it is a chance, but they *may* not notice you go up against this cloudy background, and may be tempted to take up that position by seeing the balloon go down. If they do, well—" and he looks towards his guns and smiles thoughtfully.

The younger man smiles too, takes one more pull at his flask, feels if both pairs of field-glasses are hanging round his neck, for he carries two, straps a telephone

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receiver and mouthpiece round his head, and climbs into the clothes-basket which is held by the men. The basket is attached to the rigid kite cable by runners. After testing the gear, another large kite which is harnessed to his prosaic-looking chariot is thrown into the air. Making one or two ineffectual dives, it catches the wind and begins to pull. Slowly at first the observer rises, then faster as the great wings above him catch more of the breeze. Now they feel it, and up he sails like a pantomime storm-fiend, to the accompanying moan of the wire vibrating in the wind. In a few moments he is a stationary spot far up on the slanting wire.

How insignificant in contrast to the great bulk of the balloon does the whole collection of kites appear, yet—the eye is there.

IV.

The commanding officer goes back to his station by the telephone and waits. Prrrrrt, grumbles the instrument, and this time it is he himself who takes the receiver. He listens attentively, for it is difficult to hear along an aerial line, and there is much repetition before he finally replies "All right!" to his subordinate up above. A word to a staff officer, who at once gallops off to the guns. Then ensues much activity. Within three minutes the whole line has been dragged round by hand to a position facing the hills on the east, at right angles to its former direction. The gun-layers at once start laying to the range already taken, and buckets are emptied on the ground, but no effort is made to dig shelters, for they will be unnecessary. The exposure and loss caused by the new position is ignored. When all are at their stations ready to open fire, a whistle sounds.

The suppressed excitement is catching. That the com-

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mander himself is not unaffected is shown from the manner in which he ostentatiously, and with almost too great deliberation, chooses a cigar from his case and begins chewing the end of it. . . .

"Prrrrrt," rattles the telephone: the commander drops the chewed cigar and listens.

"Are you ready?" gurgles down the wire.

"Yes."

"The head of their column is not far off the poplar-tree."

A pause. . . .

Meanwhile, on the hill-top, the watcher has again sat down. His vigil up in the air over, he sets himself to study the enemy's guns, amongst which he seems vaguely to discover some movement. Can they have suspected anything? As he sweeps his glass carelessly across the grey cloud towards its terrestrial object, something—a midget probably—in the upper corner of the object-glass catches his eye. He puts down the glass and rubs the lens with his handkerchief. He looks again. The midget is still there. He looks directly at it—it is a collection of midgets. Good God! these are no midgets—it is a covey of war kites high up in the sky! Yes, and there is the silent observer hanging some distance below, who must have seen all!

By this time two or three guns have turned out of the lane and are unlimbering.

He rises and tries to shout—it is too late.

"Now they're turning out of the road to come into action—now two guns have left the road—halloa!—are you there?" continues the thin metallic voice down the wire.

"Yes."

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"Let them have it."

The commander, from his lowly position, looks up and nods to a signaller standing up on a mound; the latter drops his flag. The air is split by the noise of the whole line of guns as they open rapid fire. It is like the report of one piece prolonged into a continuous long note.

Upon the brow of that hill of doom, hiding the skyline for perhaps 400 yards to the right of the now obscured poplar, appears a crown of magenta-coloured smoke, out of which a succession of light flashes sparkle.

By those up over there is heard a faint roar in the distance, followed by a whistling sound, and the air above—all round—is full of crackling reports, shouts, oaths and groans. Bullets tear the earth on all sides, and the steel gun-shields ring out like gongs under their blows. Everything except the dreadful sound becomes blurred in the puffs of acrid, tinted smoke which the wind drives across the hill-top.

In a minute, automatically, the fire ceases—a long period of fire for quick-firing guns which fire fifteen shells a minute and much ammunition; but this is an opportunity given by the gods.

The commander puts the telephone to his lips—

"Hullo!—is that enough?"

"Wait a minute. My God!—it is."

V.

Not one return shot has been fired.

The smoke is dissipated by the wind as soon as the squall of shell ceases, and the scene of the butchery stands revealed.

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Behind the hedge are three guns unharmed except for splintered wood. Their green tint is all mottled with oval patches of shining silver, plated by the nickel of the glancing bullets. Men are lying about singly, nearly all wounded in the head and nearly all dead. A few who still crouch paralysed behind the shields seem unhurt. Horses lie tied together by their harness in kicking, screaming bunches. At the gateway is a tangle of cap-sized gun, limber, man and beast, which entirely blocks the lane.

This is an abattoir better undescribed in detail—a medley of dead and dying men, animals and vehicles jammed into a solid mass. At intervals guns lie upturned or wedged across. The mass still struggles and heaves. Here and there drivers have half-succeeded in driving their guns up the bank, in a gallant attempt to get out of the shambles, with the result that the horses lie dead on the top and the guns lie overturned in the hollow. A few unharmed and dazed officers and men still shout orders and shove and push at the guns. There, where an ammunition waggon, hit by a badly fuzed shell, has exploded, is a cleared space. Branches and twigs are splintered in all directions, and the shrapnel balls have stripped the leaves from the trees and scattered a sparse shower of green over their handiwork.

Though at least one of the shells must have been carelessly fuzed, for on its back, under the hedge on the brow of the hill, lies the headless body of the young gunner officer, the glasses still in his left hand, a handkerchief in the right, yet, as the small voice had squeaked down the telephone wire 5000 yards away—it *was* enough !

IX.

A WINTER VENTURE.

WHETHER it was the plague, as some said, or the famine, as others said, or stories of good money to be made in 'Amreeka,' 'Afreeca,' or 'Cheen,' no one could say for certain. But the names in the Book of Hopefuls were fewer than seemed at all in accordance with the idea that the regiment had only to hold up its littlest finger for recruits to come flocking to be picked and chosen from. The book in question is one kept up by a Bengal cavalry regiment for entering the names of aspirants for service in its ranks—much in the same way as a boy's name is entered for a public school long before he goes there, or a man's name for a club.

When a recruit joins a regiment he puts down between £7 and £10 and later makes good the balance up to about £30, which is the price he has to pay for his horse and arms. The class of man that will enlist under these conditions is one that a regiment may well be proud of. The advantages of the service are many, but in the East sentiment is still a thing very much alive, and the honour and glory of it, and the fact that a man's father has served, and his father again, counts for a very great deal. And it is a state of affairs not by any means to be lightly parted with nor at all to be lost sight of in times when in an effort to be efficient we may forget what real efficiency is.

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It was to look into this matter affecting the solvency of the Book of Hopefuls that on a Christmas morning, not many years ago, I found myself lying in bed in a first-class compartment, snug, but wakeful through curiosity. We were at a standstill, and had been for some hours, and I wanted to know the reason why. Curiosity was sharpened by the recollection of a connection dependent on the train running not more than six hours late. I reared my head from its pillow and looked forth on a bright wintry sun heaving himself over the far edge of a vast flatness. Letting down the window, and thrusting out my head, I saw a light hoar frost on everything and snuffed up a very frosty air. But there was nothing in all this to account for the halt. Enginewards, I saw driver and fireman squatting on the track and smoking. Rearwards, two guards were similarly postured and similarly employed. A couple of Sarus birds floated across the sunrise uttering their not unmusical rusty-door-hinge creaks. A herd of antelope was also pasturing, and to some purpose, on a field of young barley not far off. Two buck came out of the herd, and the click of their horns as they sparred rung sharp and clear in the distance. It was all very quiet and, barring the buck—and they did not mean business—very peaceful. There was such a seasonable feeling in the air that had a peal of church bells started chiming it would not have sounded the least out of place.

It seemed a pity to disturb things by shouting, so I pulled lustily at the alarm cord, and no one paid the slightest attention. But there was that connection still rankling. So I sent forth a bellow, "Mahboob!" A doe looked up and again continued at the barley. Nothing else happened: and I knew that Mahboob was wrapt in bestial slumber, with the quilt over his ears, in a neigh-

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bouring third-class compartment. In addition now to wanting to know the reason of delay I also wanted some tea, so I got into a 'coat warm' (which is only officialese for a warm coat) and out of the carriage and stumbled along the ballast, bawling "Mahboob" louder and a great deal more audibly than railway people shout the names of stations. Presently a hooded head protruded, and Mahboob answered, "Here am I," to which I replied, "Go, varlet, prepare tea and eke get out the little rifle."

I passed to the two guards as being the brain of the train and sure to know things. They were Eurasians, and I, therefore, wished them a Merry Christmas—not so sure that they would understand, but heartened to the good deed by recollecting that a babu had once wished me "A Merry Good Friday."

The honest knaves seemed pleased. They both wore thin shoddy ulsters, topped with brilliant worsted comforters, and one of them sported—the dog—a sprig of mistletoe in his cap, which latter was the sole badge of his honourable profession; and they both looked as pinched and nipped and half-starved as only an ill-paid, under-clothed Eurasian guard can look on a slow train on a very cold Christmas morning. There was some attempt at hiding the hookah, as a thing only natives use. "The boiler being leakish, she stops," said one in answer to my inquiries.

"But can't they plug it and get on?"

"Perhaps they can or perhaps they cannot," said the other oracle sapiently.

"But without water procedure is impossible," said the first.

"What! All leaked? No water left?"

"Yes, all leaked. We shall report driver on first occasion."

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" He will be fined—yes, bitterly fined perhaps."

" And how long shall we stop here ? "

" A man has been sent to nearest station to report occurrence."

" And how far off is that ? "

" Perhaps it is five miles."

There seemed to be altogether too many perhaps's to ensure any train connections whatever. I abandoned all hope of mine on the spot. I said that as my victuals were all in the brake-van, I supposed I might break the company's regulations and break bulk and get out a tin or two of something to breakfast on. The fellow with the mistletoe smiled waggishly and said, " Yes, perhaps."

I wended enginewards and found that, indeed, the water had all leaked away ; but Mahboob, sole tenant of the cab, was holding a simmering kettle with a long furnace-rake over the expiring embers in the belly of the engine. I tried to take a rise out of the driver who was hubble-bubbling quite contentedly, and did not seem to consider my position at all.

" The Noble-man in the brake-van yonder says you will be reported for this and fined severely—and well you know you deserve it." To which he replied with a hateful nonchalance that it was nobody's fault—neither his nor his fireman's. That it was a known matter that ' her ' plates (jerking a finger at the engine) were worn to paper, and that there would be no fining whatever ; also that I should miss my connection all right. He smiled wanly—I fear he was a sardonic man.

I said then that I had only one request to make, and that was that he would whistle loudly before starting the train, because I wanted to go and shoot a buck. He replied that having no steam he could not whistle, but (he was a sportsman, if sardonic) that he would stand on his cab and

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wave a shovel and shout—and perhaps I might give him a haunch in return.

It was a bargain.

“We are Mohammedans, though,” he added.

“My servant is one, and he shall accompany me.”

“No! servants are usually no better than Kafirs and idol-worshippers. Let Abdul, my fireman, go with you, and you lend him your knife.”

Telling Mahboob to extract food from the brake-van and prepare breakfast, my fireman and I started armed respectively with a large knife and a small rifle. The sun was now of a pleasant warmth, and the third-class, *en masse*, evicted itself on to the up-line, to warm and watch sport.

“Many’s the time I’ve seen these dishonest ones,” said the fireman, alluding to the antelope. “They are always here or hereabouts—sons of infamy!”

I asked Abdul what he would do if I shot the buck dead.

A Mohammedan can only eat meat that has had its throat cut by a Mohammedan while it is alive, and during the recital of a short formula called the ‘Kulma.’

“I have noticed,” said Abdul, the natural historian, “that really wild animals are never shot dead. There’s always just enough life left to say the words quickly while you are running up to them, and to cut their throats after. I never count an animal really dead till he has stopped bleeding.”

“But, Abdul—do you know the words of the Kulma?”

“Well, sahib, to speak the truth, no, I don’t. But my son who goes to school—he does. After all, the throat-cutting is the great thing. Sons of devils! They’re moving off.”

As hard words break no bones, I asked Abdul to leave off using them and to lie down and simulate in his sooty

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garments a charred tree-stump, while I began to walk towards and around the buck.

Now, no one but Dr Carver and suchlike, and they only at glass balls, like shooting to a gallery. The whole of the third-class squatted and basked and looked. The engine-driver had mounted the body of his engine and was leaning against his funnel—a most unprofessional proceeding—and I felt that it put me off. The only sound that broke the stillness was Mahboob distantly crashing amongst enamelled iron-ware as if to show people that he, at any rate, took no thought for a herd of common antelope. I knew, however, that he, too, was looking out of the window of the lavatory, where servants, since Indian trains were, establish their emergency kitchens.

The long and short of it was that I fired and missed. Abdul sprang up waving a knife after the departing herd. The driver climbed back into the engine; the third-class continued impassive, and Mahboob, in a voice of thinly veiled scorn, shouted that breakfast was ready. Abdul rushed up shouting, "Is he hit? Is he *quite* dead?" I knew this was mere impertinence on Abdul's part, but refrained from clouting his head because it looked like oily cotton-waste—and it was Christmas. After receiving surly assurances that the quarry still breathed, he mounted a convenient tree and gazed round the horizon.

"Cowards! Poultry! They still run—sons of shame! But there is yet another herd still undisturbed yonder. Come quick!" and he ran down the trunk, and we were about to start in pursuit when his mate appeared on the cab-roof waving the shovel and shouting.

Far in the flat distance appeared the smoke of the salvage engine, and the faint but growing murmur of its approach was audible. We and it arrived simultaneously, and, hooked by the nose, we were once more drawn for-

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ward. I gave Abdul the knife when we parted to make up for the Christmas haunch on which we had counted before it was hatched, and I was sorry for the two hungry-looking guards who would also have had a bit.

The connection was, of course, missed by hours.

Next morning it was still more bitterly cold, but the engine was water-tight. We had left the absolutely flat country and had come to one of another sort, a desert of rolling snow-white sandhills and thorn-trees ; of no water, and young green corn shooting up between the drifts, apparently existing on sufferance. Early in the afternoon we pulled up at a little sandy station, sandy but quite feudal, for its master stepped forward with a gold coin to be touched and remitted, instead of demanding my ticket. The place was full of bags of grain, and in the tainted breeze was more than a hint of camel.

A young native officer of my regiment met me. With him was his father, a very old, tough, hawk-like gentleman in spotless white and the neatest little embroidered Punjabi shoes, and hands like iron. He had been Risaldar-Major of my regiment for many years. Leaving the son to dig out the kit and load it, the tough old man enthroned me on the front seat of a blood-looking camel, and taking his place behind we set off for a five-mile jog-trot. After mutual inquiries after our precious healths, and after he had said that I was looking thin and that he was having some trouble with his eyes, and after I had said that he was looking no older than when he had left us twelve years ago, after nearly forty years' service, I asked him what was his reason for the shortage of recruits from his village and country. " Was it plague ? "

" No."

" Were other regiments poaching on our grounds ? "

" Certainly not."

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“ Was it unpopularity of the service ? ”

“ No.”

“ Was it famine ? ” (It was a famine year.) To this he let out a dry chuckle into the nape of my neck.

“ No, surely.”

“ What was it, then ? ”

“ Look ye, sahib,” he said, “ I’ll tell you the reason in one word—it’s full bellies. There’s not an empty one in the countryside.”

I asked the coarse old veteran to explain.

“ Look ye,” he said, “ I speak only of my own country and not of those in my arm-pit ” (by which he meant ‘ adjacent ’—a vulgar old dog, but one who wasted no words, and never had, in expressing himself). “ Here we have plenty of stuff, but very little money. No one goes empty. The poorest fills his belly once a-day. But of hard cash we have but little. There are plenty of young men who want to serve, but their fathers want them on the land and won’t put down the joining money. Now in Ludhiana over yonder military service is the fashion, and always was. Every village is full of servants ” (and by servants he meant what the word used pure and simple always means—*i.e.*, men in the Service). “ Every family has at least one male a servant. You yourself remember several sets of two and three brothers serving in one squadron. Here it is different. We are better men and harder and tougher, for you see what the country is, dry, sandy, full of thorns—but with such crops ! Here a one and there a one serves. If a man gets on (as I did), his brothers and their sons will come. But it is not the fashion. They are wanted on the land. Now when there’s a famine they’ll come because their bellies are empty. For myself, I paid the joining money of all my troop. None of them could have enlisted otherwise.”

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I knew my benevolent, canny old friend well enough to feel tolerably certain that in these patriarchal dealings with his men a substantial interest had been charged on the sums thus advanced.

"Ha! Look ye, now! These are my fields—a double crop, grain and barley. One does not want water and grows on the surface. The other wants it and sends its roots deep. So they grow together like friends. And those fields were Duffadar Jit Singh's, dead of plague: and those my brother's, and those yonder Maluk Singh's, dead also of plague, with all his house. You remember him, doubtless? But it's a fine country, a fine country. You should come in April, when the crops are chin-high."

I was willing to take the old gentleman's word for it, but to the strange eye the fine country seemed to consist largely of rolling sandhills and thorn-trees, with a dash of errant camel dining off the latter. Here and there a little green corn sprang in the hollows. There was no sign of water or irrigation wells, nor of any boundaries or marks whatever. On my remarking on the absence of wells he again chuckled deeply.

"Wells!" he said. "Wells! Look ye. 'Tis a fine country, but we have none of that sort of well here. Why, the one we have in my village is three hundred cubits deep, masonry-lined top to bottom, and cost two thousand rupees to make. But the water is sweet water, famous, quite famous. Why! many villages hereabouts have only brackish water: some have none at all and have to send for it. It's a fine country and fine men in it. Look at me, now. I served thirty-eight years, four months and three days, seeing four campaigns, beginning with the Mutiny and ending in Misr [Egypt]. I don't exactly know how old I am, but I am well over seventy, and I can do a harder day's work than any man hereabouts."

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I asked him how on earth one man could distinguish his boundaries from another, as there were no visible marks. Was it the sandhills? No—sandhills were always changing shape, and not seldom, if a certain wind blew long enough, their position as well. How was it, then? By the trees? Well, no, not by the trees exactly. How then? Oh, there were marks—everyone knew his marks. What marks? Oh, just marks everywhere. My host's patience seemed to be giving out, and to cut my importunity short, he said, "Any fool who has been brought up on the land must know his father's fields, marks or no marks, he just *knows* them!" And that is as far as I got in the matter.

We were now approaching the village, one of large baked mud-houses—boasting nothing of beauty but much of solid respectability. There were three of three storeys, belonging to my host and his brothers. The village had been founded by their father, and the whole of it was inhabited now by a term signifying 'descendants'! A small outwork was assigned to the village menials, sweepers, washermen and craftsmen. These were not to be confused in any way with the Sikh yeoman, who only sullies his hands with earth off his own freehold. Quite apart from the village was a little treed enclosure, which we may call the manse, where dwelt the Sikh minister and the Book, for the Sikh is a combination of godliness and extreme thrift (not to call it by a harsher name). In these qualities and a partiality for strong drink, his excellence as a soldier and as a farmer, his prototype may be found north of Tweed. We turned, not into the village, but into the manse, my host saying that I should be more comfortable there, away from the barking of the village dogs and proximity to the beasts who dwell on such intimate terms with their owners. Here we alighted, and here

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assembled certain elders with many youngers. These latter were introduced airily, with a wave of the hand, as 'my descendants.' We sat in rows, and were very silent, and stared and breathed very hard—and one of us felt very sheepish and longed for the baggage to arrive, so that the gathering might be dismissed. Strong drink, even whisky with soda served in bright green tumblers, with biscuits, arrived. So also did a huge china-blue-eyed water-buffalo, snuffing direfully at the strange smell of white man, and contemplating an assault. A nearly naked urchin, however, ran in upon him and smote him so woundily on his knobby flanks with a huge staff that he snuffed his way out again.

My visitors bore every conceivable degree of relationship to men serving and who had served in the regiment. They were gradually made known to me, my memory being severely taxed in the process. Thus :

"Jiwan Singh, son of Assar Singh, come forward," said my host. A little unhappy boy was pushed into the front.

"Don't eat shame, Jiwan Singh ; there is nothing to eat it about."

But Jiwan Singh continued to twist his fingers and devour shame in any quantity, and while I gradually arrived at the fact that his father's other wife's sister had married somebody else's father's son : and *their* son was the man who had had a thin chestnut horse, a persistently thin horse it was—which kicked and bit everyone and wind-sucked, and who had, during a field-day twelve years ago—no, thirteen years ago—fallen down a well and was not killed, but on being hauled to the surface bit two men and kicked a third ; and did not I now remember the circumstance well, especially as the horse had grown fat and hearty afterwards ? I did not.

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" Here, come forward, Tek Singh, son of Maluk Singh the fifth, and get you gone, Jiwan Singh—now *this* lad's father"—and so on and so forth.

I only mention the above dialogue as an instance of the excruciating—there is no other word for it—relationships created by people who have one real wife, and must take over a deceased brother's wife, and who have large families, and go on multiplying under the ancestral roof-tree till the ancestor dies, and his land is divided up amongst the sons; whose sisters marry into villages close by, and begin spinning out more and more fearful kinds of relationships with all the husband's folk. To remain a bachelor is a thing practically unknown. And the generic term of cousin or 'connection' is seldom used, because every conceivable degree of relationship has a name peculiar to itself.

I set to work that very night with the young native officer to compile a vocabulary of these degrees, but we did not get down on paper more than a fraction of them. It began with " Maternal uncle's wife," " Maternal uncle's other wife," " Maternal uncle's wife's son and daughter " and " the other lady's son and daughter." This, however, took nearly an hour to work out, and I retired to rest.

When the baggage arrived I dismissed my visitors and retired into my prophet's chamber, which was very fine and large once you got inside, but the front door was only four feet high and half as wide. Inside, however, it opened more generously into a courtyard; and off this dwelt the minister, a most venerable-looking old party. He was engaged in cooking his evening meal; and when he had finished it, and I mine, we sat in the courtyard and talked. I was at some pains to find out what his duties were, and in what estimate he was regarded by his flock. I think he was too simple to see that out of his own lips I

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learnt that his religion was not in a very flourishing state.

"First, Baba-Ji [Sir Father], do you mind my smoking?"

"No, so long as it comes not near the Book : and that is locked up in the chamber. You shall see it to-morrow."

"Do you live all alone here? Have you no wife or disciples to do for you?"

"Wife I have none, though, as you know, we may marry. Disciples I have two, but they are both away on a long tour. I know not when they will return. Sometimes they send me a post-card to say that all is well. They travel far, seeking for converts."

"And how do they live? Do you send them money?"

"They are holy men. People always feed holy men, no matter whether they be filthy fakeers or even mad Mohammedans thinking only murder and hatred toward all that think not as they. Holy men must not be bothered with little matters such as that of food."

"And what work do you do here?"

"I keep the Book and teach the Word to such children as are sent, those whose fathers are good Sikhs, but the mothers care not. Not one of the women but would like to feed a Brahmin. Some of them go long journeys to Hindu fairs, where there are great crowds and gay dresses and toys for the children. But the Rissaldar-Major Sahib is a good Sikh. All his household are duly baptised by me, and he will have no Brahmins at the marriages—not he."

The impressive ceremony by which any man of any race may become a Sikh, and which is performed on Sikh children when they reach years of discretion, bears striking resemblances to our own baptism, confirmation and holy communion. There is the naming of the candidate, the

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sprinkling of the forehead with water and the eating of a mixture of flour and water out of a common dish by all present, and later at stated intervals. The likeness to our own observances is, however, purely a chance one. The eating out of the common dish is the outward sign of the renouncing of all caste distinctions, which are not recognised by the Sikh religion.

It is said, and I fear truly said, that Sikhism is decaying ; that what remains of the military religious spirit, which is the keynote of the faith, is largely fostered by service in our army ; and that it is slowly sinking back into the slough of that corrupt Hinduism from which it was lifted and purified by the first Sikh teacher, Nanak, more than four hundred years ago.

The native officer, to whom I spoke later on this subject, rather gave me to understand that the old priest was a respectable sort of tag, without which no decent Sikh community should be, but who was not really necessary to its welfare, spiritually or otherwise. The women-folk, he said, were all for the Brahmins and the jolly fairs and gatherings organised by these astute Jesuits. The materialism of the Hindu religion appealed far more to them than their own pure but sombre faith, in which indeed the saintly Nanak had provided their sex with but few attractions.

Next morning a row of youths were drawn up for inspection. " Those that you reject," said the native officer, " will be the laughing-stock of the village—so . . . you understand."

I said I quite understood that they were to be let down gently. We divided them into three lots—those that were too big and heavy, those that might do and those that were too small and puny. The big ones were complimented on their physique ; their deep chests were pounded

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till they boomed like drums ; their legs and arms fulsomely admired ; and they were then earnestly recommended to try the foot ; and we were at pains to explain that fine young men such as they were would break any horse's back.

The small ones were told to drink as much milk and eat as much meat as they could come by for a year, and they would be certain to be just right next year.

The likely ones were stripped and closely examined for make, shape and action, and then entered up in the order of their physical merit. Mentally they were like a lot of jolly young buffaloes. They were asked all sorts of questions as to age, father's consent and ability to afford to enlist. The native officer was sponsor for their social status and character. Those that had regimental claims—that is, fathers or relations serving, or who had served—were given precedence over others who had not. Finally, the whole lot, rejected and elected, were made to run a race, and the winner, being of the rejected, immediately claimed the right of becoming an elected, and was acclaimed as such at once by the assembled elders, without any reference to me.

My next appointment was thirty miles distant at the village of another native officer, and I was to halt half-way for the night at the house of his father-in-law, because it was a three-storeyed house, eminently suitable to distinguished strangers. I began to move at the manse early next morning, for there were several things to do. First of all, the elected had to be arranged for. They had only begun their trials, and had now to be sent to the nearest military station and medically examined. This was not so simple a business as one might suppose. There was a railway journey with a change in it, and at the end a regimental hospital to be found ; and the elected were

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about as capable of accomplishing this as a herd of their own beasts without a drover. A smart young sowar had been sent up for the purpose of herding them there. But military doctors have a habit of sometimes deputing the tiresome work of examining recruits to their native subordinates ; and these latter have a tiresome habit of demanding so much a-head, in default of which they write down every recruit as too old if he look mature, or too young if he be of callow appearance. It is a safe and winsome game to play. So the sowar was armed with a letter to the doctor ; and to make assurance doubly sure I compounded a felony, and told him, if the worst came to the worst, to pay a rupee a-head to the subordinate rather than have all his flock rejected for the lack of a trifle of recognised palm-oil. Then there were small gifts of a spirituous nature to my host to be made, and packets of tea to certain ladies of his household, strictly in retirement of course. These, I found later, had no use for tea, only men being allowed these luxuries : the ladies would have liked loaf-sugar. Not to be outdone in munificence, and probably under marital orders, they sent me out shawls covered with much laborious embroidery, if not very artistic. I eagerly inquired whether I might not touch and remit these, as I had the gold coins presented by my male friends, but I was told that this was business. So I carried them off reluctantly. And so to camel and away ; but we had not got very far when the young native officer who accompanied me remembered that there was no water, or, at least, none fit to drink, at my night's halting-place ; and that meant a return and the despatch of a swift camel to throw in the necessary supply.

Fifteen miles on a good camel is easily done. We tarried a little on the way at a notable Sikh shrine and sat under a tree, and silent multitudes slowly gathered to

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stare ; but I was hardening under the process, and felt that I might in time look as impassive as royalty itself. At sundown we came to the village and even to the third storey itself. There was a narrow gullet of a staircase, up which, after me, pressed as many of the village as there was standing-room for on the flat roof outside my quarters, for the usual welcoming stare. It was done with perfect respect and friendliness, and if the master of the house thought no harm in it, why should I ? Here there were but few soldiers, public favour having been attracted to British Columbia, whither I was asked to address several letters acknowledging receipt of money. I was getting rather tired of the crowd and was considering measures for its dispersion, when a burly fellow shouldered his way through it and seized the rifle I was cleaning out of my hand, saying, " I was a servant : I understand these things : let me clean it." But he first swept the people down the stairs. My protector explained that he had served in the King's African Rifles, and had come home to rest on his laurels and resume his place at the plough handle, producing in proof of his statement his discharge certificate and a couple of medals. Only one fellow out of the crowd had remained. I said, " Friend, what may *you* want ? "

" I have but one request to make," he replied ; " you being my both parents and, in fact, everything to me, who else, indeed, should I come to for anything I want ? "

" Well, and what *do* you want ? "

" I only want to tell you that I am so happy at having seen you, that I should like to go on seeing you for ever and ever. Now, I think that this might best be accomplished by your enlisting me. Therefore, kindly do so at once."

I told him that I would see him next day, but that meanwhile I thought he had seen as much of me as was good for either of us, and that as I was about to tub, the sooner he made off the better. This he did, pausing at the stair-head as if to make some further request ; on which I asked Ram Singh to remove him, and he disappeared. This suppliant had not the smallest wish to see me again or to enlist ; he only wanted to say something really pleasing to a stranger.

Next day a fifteen-mile march was lengthened into thirty in turning aside into villages and in excursions after the not very elusive antelope. Under the load of their venison and well down below Plimsoll's mark, we reached our halting-place at sundown.

I found here a tent and a *shamiana*, or flat-roofed wall-less pavilion, pitched ready for me in a little orchard outside the village. My host, a very handsome Sikh native officer, had recently taken his pension, and was of a type which is fast vanishing under the breath of education. Bluff and outspoken even for a Britisher, he was doubly so for a native. He was just able to read and write, but I do not think ever put pen to paper except to sign his name—yet he was as sharp as a needle and full of common-sense. There had been no mild patriarchal rule in his troop—which is a very good sort of rule, too, in a way, and reaches all sorts of shady spots that discipline could never throw a ray on to ; he had but to crook his little finger and men trembled. After thirty-four years' service he had begun to run to flesh, and it had become a desperate matter to mount him properly. He had recently received the grant of land which is the reward of long and honourable service, and had retired a few months before my visit. He explained to me that there had recently been a small matter of sickness in the village, merely a score or

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so of 'nobodies,' who had eaten largely of dead camel, and had died themselves afterwards. Some men said it was plague—no one knew.

"So I cleared out the village for a month, and made everyone live in the open. Grumbling they did it; and grumbling they broke holes through their thatches. If the sickness had not stopped, I'd have had the doctor Sahib here, and inoculated the whole boiling, and put the pink stuff in the well. We, who have served, know all about that, and what lies they talk about poisoning wells and ruining caste. Bah! We're back again now, as you see, but I thought you were better in a tent than in my house—you understand. I'll come round after you have washed and had your dinner. You have brought me some venison and rum; your kindness, Adab." ('Respect': the younger generation says 'Salaam,' but I like the old word best.)

Later we sat in the *shamiana* and he put down an astounding number of whiskies and—lemonades; and the welkin rang with his Berserk laughter, and I heard many strange tales of things I could never have heard about under more usual surroundings. It was only a year or so previous that he had been in London as orderly officer to the King—to whom he had hoped to have presented a petition asking for various little favours, such as extra pension and grants of land in impossible neighbourhoods. There were, however, the severest orders against worrying his Majesty. "It was a matter of great regret to me, as it was a *full* petition about *everything* I deserved, and the King would certainly have set such small matters right. There were, however, strict orders against us presenting petitions—why, I know not—but mine I had always ready either up my sleeve or in my cummerbund or in my turban, and I should have presented

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it had opportunity offered : but the King is a man never alone, never at leisure."

There were also difficulties about food, owing to the extraordinary orders prohibiting the beheading of sheep with sharp swords in the region of Eccleston Square.

"They told us that sheep might certainly be killed in any way we liked, but beyond the town. But, Sahib, what a town! Why, it was a day's march into the country. I sent Jiwan Singh, my orderly, who can speak English, to find out. He left at sunrise and returned at sunset, having been helped much by the police. After that we had to do with hens, fine birds, but expensive."

As he rose to bid me "Good night," he said, "You'll remember Jit Singh. Keep a place for him in the squadron. He is now fourteen. They tell me that at the Khalsa College he is a bad boy and won't learn English and become a babu! Ha! ha! fancy a son of mine a babu!" and he disappeared into the darkness, his roars of laughter slightly jolting over—well, lemonade is hiccoughy stuff.

Next day there were thirty miles to be done straight off—nothing much to a good riding camel, but a long day to one carrying the baggage, with Mr Mahboob atop of the load. I got them under way fairly early. But that was only make-believe, for, of course, the camel had to throw the lot off into a ploughed field, and when he had been retrieved from his domicile in some ancestral patio, and the load adjusted again, and the domestic balanced nicely at its summit, they at length disappeared into the chilly morning mist.

There was a poor show of hopefuls here, and I upbraided my host with it. "What would you have, sahib?" he replied testily. "I could line up thirty youths for you to see, and they'd all say they wanted to join, but when the time came their fathers wouldn't let them. They are

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wanted on the land. I've paid many a man's joining money in my day, but it's pension with me now, not pay, and I can't afford it. Tell the Colonel Sahib that." So we parted, my escort now being my host's brother, a duffadar serving in the regiment : and we put in the day agreeably enough, looking in at villages and shooting more antelope than we could carry ; but people whose fields suffer from their depredations are not sorry to see them shot, nor to make a good meal off them when they get the chance. Just at dark we arrived at the outskirts of a village, where it was pleasing to find that not only had the kit arrived, but the tent was up, and Mahboob, squatting in a nimbus of smoke that would blind a white man, tending his pots.

Here I had no native officer, only one or two sowars, sons of substantial men in the village, who were ready enough to show what influential fellows they were by summoning their co-villagers and clansmen to the colours. There were some thirty of these to inspect next morning, and they boiled down to half that number. I might send them in to the nearest military station at X—— if I liked, but the babu there was undefeatable, and his terms higher than anyone could afford—much better try Y——, where the babu was a man of known probity. So Y—— it was.

I now had only six or seven miles to do to the railway, which was to convey me to my next centre. A mob of sportsmen ran with us while the breath remained in them, but we left them standing on various sandhills, craning, in the hopes of seeing a shot. The inevitable camel-load or two accompanied us, however. It was only when approaching the little railway station that we came on the eternal antelope—little ravine deer these—dotted about amongst herds of cattle.

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While we were moving on looking for a clear space for a shot, a herd of not less than 300 black buck came careering towards us. They ricochetted madly over the unfenced railway line and disappeared behind the embankment. I threw a leg over the peak of the saddle and slipped to the ground for a shot at a ravine deer, telling my companions to keep moving on, which, of course, they did not. Ensued the following :

"Don't shoot ! There are cattle in the way." "Shoot ! you'll just clear them." "But there's a man squatting in a field right in the line." "Look sharp, the train's in view." At this point a pair of soft-looking plump brown legs, garnished with white socks and wearing patent leather elastic-sided shoes with false pearl buttons, came into my view as I lay prone on a whole nest of clinging thorny burrs. By screwing my neck round and up, my eyes travelled past the socks and the podgy knees, to a petticoat garment, and above that to a most benevolent smiling face, wearing the largest species of goggles and a small velvet cap with 'Station Master' chastely enscribed on it.

"Sir," said the face, clasping its hands, which held a red and green flag, "I am here Station Master, drawing small salary, with large wife and children, for so savage desert place as above." Here he indicated his station.

"No doubt you will rise to better things in time, Babu. Meanwhile, step aside, for your comely legs are in jeopardy, and the train, which you must detain, is arriving."

"Sir," continued the official, nimbly removing himself from the danger-zone, "there is no hurry. I am detaining her up to half-hour if you order. I, too, have lethal weapon, but my hand shivers at devilish bang and antelopes are saved."

There was now a renewed outcry from the spectators—

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“The buck! the buck!” and the three hundred, having impinged on some new terror beyond the railway embankment, came rocketing into view again straight towards the scene of operations, already too thickly occupied by three ravine deer, a herd of cattle and a cultivator.

Right into the midst of these they dashed, and with one accord, from leading doe to hindmost buck, pulled up dead. The train was sizzling in the station. The foresight was making a tempting white bull's-eye against the coal black shoulder of the only buck that was not covered by a doe. It was a long 250 yards, through a sort of alleyway of cattle. Next moment two hundred and ninety-eight antelope leapt into the air and vanished in dust. The Station Master and my companions had most of the rest of the herd, to wit, the buck and the doe behind him, which had fallen to the same bullet.

The train carried me into a very different country—one smiling and fat with the canals forced by a cruel Government on its down-trodden peasantry. On arrival at my destination I was sadly disappointed at my old friend Rissaldar Sohan Singh. He should have known me better than to have spread a table for me in the presence of his friends, several of whom were assembled on the platform, and to have furnished it with hard-boiled eggs and flakes of sugar, and grapes from Cabul in little wooden boxes, and queer tumblers, and suspicious-looking bottles. My cup of misery was about full to overflowing, when the local schoolmaster was pushed to the front with an address in English in which I was called ‘Your Majesty,’ and everyone else my slaves! I was further discomfited when I learned that a young good-for-nothing non-commissioned officer, of whom I highly disapproved, had been deputed to put me up in his house, because it was the best in the village. There was a drive of half a dozen miles along a

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magnificent canal bank, in the flashy dog-cart of my flashy young N.C.O., and on arrival I found on the table of my chamber a box of cigars (tobacco, in a Sikh house !), and was asked whether I would like champagne for dinner. I told him to have the cigars removed at once, and not to mention the word champagne to me, on which he confessed that these preparations had been made on the information of that Gehazi, Mr Sham Singh, my orderly, who doubtless wished to pose as an authority on how to do things really well. He and I had a stern reckoning a week or two later.

Old Sohan Singh stood, with the added height of his enormous and beautifully tied head-dress, nearer seven feet high than six. He possessed the extraordinarily handsome features common to his race, and more than the usual share of a Sikh's dignity and military 'port.' His snow-white beard, reaching when loose far below his waist, was carefully parted at the chin, and the two branches, neatly inter-twisted with red silk and carried up along either cheek, disappeared under the 'pug' or little under-turban which confines the long hair of Sikhs—one of the five outward and visible signs of their faith being long hair, untouched by scissors. Of all Sikh officers and men whom I have known, he was the one I would first call friend. He was as dense an old carl as only a Sikh can be ; but, for high sense of duty, an old-fashioned loyalty, scorn of lying, good breeding and manners, he was, indeed, a gentleman of the very best type. Without any undue outward display of the emblems of his religion, he was a very pious, God-fearing old man. For the rest he spoke in a deep bellow ; and, a little deaf by nature, made himself still more so by tying his turban well down over both ears. This used to cause some little friction between us on parade. His village had been so

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sorely visited by plague that there were literally no men available as recruits. Nor was there the slightest reason to suppose that the sickness would not return just as badly next spring. Yet there was no grumbling or repining. Occasionally I have noticed a smart keen man relinquish all interest in his work and become silent, dour and unresponsive. I have been told, on asking his native officer what the reason was—"Oh, his heart's broken; all his house have died within a week." India to-day shows a stoicism that Stoics might have envied. How would it be now in hysterical Great Britain? Mahboob here met an old campaigning friend, a genial pensioner now, who in earlier days had borne the shakiest of characters.

Mahboob was lucky (not many Sikhs and Moham-medans are friends), for he went sick here and had his friend to nurse him, and left me for the next fortnight to subsist vicariously on eggs and milk supplied by much cumbered hosts, who supposed that a sahib's wants were as immense as they seemed complicated.

Not long before, Rissaldar Sohan Singh had been staying with me—that is, he was accommodated in his old squadron at my charges. I knew the old gentleman never touched liquor, but his deputy hosts managed all that for him in the most self-sacrificing way. When his visit was up he invited the British officers to dine with him, which meant dining in their own mess at his expense. "I want it really well done," he said. "There must be no stinting, and there must be lots of sarmkeen" (champagne). We told him that champagne now was only drunk to keep inspecting-generals company and ensure pleasant dealings with them; but that in the matter of whiskies-and-sodas, although we were not very great at them, we would do our very best. This did not at all

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satisfy him ; but finding we were obdurate, he remarked with just the merest hint of scorn in his voice—

“ Well, in my day, forty-two years ago, things were different. Sahibs drank lots then—lots, I say—and every night. Many times I saw the colonel sahib come on to parade in the morning the worse. The adjutant sahib was the same : once he fell from his horse. And all sahibs drank much wine in those days.” We told Sohan Singh that things were indeed changed : that what went in liquor then now went in an extra polo pony and a great deal of extra health. And he said that this was a good thing ; but with so little zest that it was amply conveyed to us that, whatever their faults, the men of past days were jolly good fellows, and that we were not to think ourselves little saints for merely following the fashion of our day and always remaining sober !

“ I have often told you of the bridge,” said the Risaldar that night after dinner. “ To-morrow you shall see it at last. The meaning of the name of my village is ‘ the abode of horses ’ ; and long ago, before the canal came and the crops, so it was—just a grass plain where our horses ran, picking up what they could. Then came the canal, and what was barren waste became as you see it now. Poor men grew rich, thin men fat, and we hoped for famines. The greater the scarcity elsewhere the better prices we got for grain. Land trebled and quadrupled in value. Further, the canal caused the water-level to rise everywhere, so that in high ground, where still we required wells for irrigation, we only had to dig them half as deep and the labour of raising water was halved. I will show you all this when we ride over my land to-morrow. But the village lay on one side of the canal and our land on the other. There was a bridge three miles

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up and another three miles down ; but that meant a six-mile journey for our carts to come and go. We talked this matter over, and resolved to lay it before the Sirkar. Everyone said, ' Rissaldar Sahib, you must go to Ludhiana and ask for a bridge.' I said, ' I am a man of small face. Who am I to go and interview Great Ones ? ' But they would have it so, because I had served the Sirkar and had some small reputation hereabouts, and my uniform. So I said, ' I am a man of small face, but I will go.' I put on my full dress, mounted my black horse, and went. At the door of the Canal Sahib's office in Ludhiana there was some trouble with the chuprassi, but the Sahib heard the talk and called out, ' Who is there ? ' I replied, ' The Rissaldar is there.' He bade me come in, and received me kindly and asked after the regiment ; and I laid the whole matter before him. He said, ' Rissaldar Sahib, you know what hard things the Sirkar's orders are, and they are for bridges at certain fixed intervals along the canal—no more, no less. But I will see what can be done,' and with that he gave me leave to go. I had not much hope, but in time the bridge was built, and not an ordinary stone one either, but a strong bridge made of much iron, fit to bear trains. They call it my bridge, and in summer-time the boys dive off it."

- I asked him whether increased property had changed the people much, to which he answered, " Yes, gradually it has changed them. The country was a dry one, now it is wet : there is more fever now. Men have not to work so hard : they are not so hard themselves. Further, though there is no harm in a well-to-do man lending money to a poor one at interest—and indeed most of our savings are invested in that way—still it is bad for men who have always been soldiers or cultivators to become money-

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lenders, and that is what riches tend to make some of them."

Before riding out next morning he took me to his house. Old Mrs Sohan Singh was not on view, of course, and much less Miss Sohan Singh, but I should have liked to have seen one who "busied herself constantly over household affairs" and "was kind but severe to the maids, nourishing them with milk, and lavish with harsh medicines when they were sick." Miss Sohan Singh was to be made to marry nobody she did not like. For those parts she was rather a lucky girl.

The old gentleman was very proud of his sanitary arrangements, conducted strictly on military lines, and I imagine quite a novelty in a native village.

"You see, sahib," he said, after finally showing me a very fat sleek horse in a loose-box, with an English blanket over him, "I am ready when I am wanted—I have a horse, saddlery and arms. Daily on rising I do exercises to keep myself in fettle, and I carefully guard my uniform from the moths. Send for me and I will come."

That was another long day, riding from village to village. The military—it was Christmas leave time—past and present, and of all three arms, were ubiquitous. They were gathered in villages against our coming with their innumerable offspring; they erected themselves out of furrows in the dim distance, and stood to attention while we passed; they ran from the plough, and they emerged suddenly out of standing crops or herds of cattle, with the broadest of grins, and brought themselves up with a jerk, clicking their heels and making the most tremendous salutes with earthy hands, to ask after regiment or battery, or to pass the time of day. And at sundown we came to a canal bungalow, trim with its green lawns and garden,

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and a weir close by making pleasant murmurs. Here another native officer took me over, one who had risen by the strength of his own right arm rather than by reason of his birth and position, accidents which have to be taken very much into consideration when promoting a man. In the East rank is something more than the guinea stamp. As he was not a wealthy man, I was sorry he was being put to the expense of keeping thirty or more men, collected from the neighbourhood and awaiting my arrival. But old Sohan Singh, to whom I mentioned this, tersely remarked, "It is well—his authority will increase by it." And I hope it did, for he rather wanted it. He was very attentive and kind, if a little fussy, and afforded contrast in a hundred ways to the quiet undisturbing courtliness of my three previous hosts.

The next day was the longest I had had so far, for it began early with an inspection of the thirty, and ended at three o'clock next morning. The interim was fully occupied with a longish ride and much sitting under trees on charpoys talking to old gentlemen with snowy beards and nice manners, but prolix. Many of them were occupying lands granted them for service during the Mutiny. Most of them wanted to be posted as to the military aspect of affairs in general, and their own corps in particular; and their requests were various, and they saw to it that they were duly noted in a pocket-book. Some wanted new medal ribbon for themselves; others speedy recognition of their sons' services; others grants of land at the shortest possible notice; and they all wanted to know what the 'Rooss-Log' (Russians) were up to, 'Rooss' being a generic term signifying enemies of the British empire.

Eventually I struck a high road, and embarked in a weird conveyance, and drove many painful miles and came once again to the railway, and left that again at 3 o'clock

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A.M. on a particularly frosty morning for a few hours' slumber.

At 9 A.M. a new tour began in another district ; but as it was a repetition of those just narrated I need not recount it. The reason for shortage here was 'lack of favour.' "But that," said the very young native officer just promoted, "is now remedied. It is now twenty years since any man enlisted in this district was made a native officer. That was my father, and now I, the son, have been promoted, everyone in these parts will be pleased ; and young men will enlist now that they have a native officer to serve under whom they know."

As was right and proper I finished up with a visit to the Golden Temple, or Durbar Sahib, as Sikhs call it, at Amritsar. This is the focus of their religion, and round it lingers many a heroic tradition of the troublous past, which hammered them into what they became, and which, let us hope, peaceful times will leave unaltered.

To the West her Westminster Abbey with the hush and solemnity of its sombre aisles : to the East her Golden Temple with its sunshine, glitter and noise. Each hemisphere according to her taste. I was not impressed with the Golden Temple, its gilded roofs, painted walls, the jewelled gaudiness of its holy of holies set in its marble tank. Nor with the throng of the professional Godly—many of it naked—much of it unwashed ; nor with the globe-trotter, hurrying about in list slippers, camera in hand. But the sturdy country-women, with the children, all in gala dress, wandering wide-eyed through the marble courts, did not jar. Was it a Hannah that I saw holding her chubby little brown Samuel by the hand, and contemplating in silence the hoary old Eli bent over his Scriptures in a sequestered marble shrine ? Here was no glare or noise—only the cooing of countless pigeons.

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And on a wall hard by was a tablet telling in three languages of gallant deeds done and deaths suffered by Sikh soldiers.

“And at night,” said my companion politely, drawing me away from so discreditably dull a part of his temple—“at night it is all—every bit of it—lit up with electric light—it is like day, splendid! Come now and see the jewelled temple. There you must make some small offering in coin for the poor; everyone does.” We went. I handed a note to a follower, who passed it with a whispered word to the priest. He cast it into the great bowl with the copper coins, and flowers and sweetmeats, and lassoing me with a marigold garland and a dexterity acquired, I felt sure, by practice on the necks of delighted globe-trotters—roared out to the throng of worshippers:

“The Major Sahib has given ten rupees! Pray for the Major Sahib.”

Of the hundred hopefuls I had seen I had eliminated fifty. Some of these again failed to satisfy the severe medical tests required from our Indian soldiers. Enough remained to restore the Book of Hopefuls to its wonted state of solvency.

X.

THE SECOND DEGREE.

"It is to be ignorant and blind in the science of commanding armies to think that a general has anything more important to do than to apply himself to learning the inclinations and character of his adversary."—POLYBIUS.

I.

THE message ended ; there was a ' stop,' and the sweating operator took his hand from the key. The sleeve of his shirt had slipped down over his wrist and had been balking him for some time ; but so slack did he feel that he had waited to signal the final meaningless group of letters and receive the acknowledgment before stopping to push it back.

It was the last of that series of messages. He jabbed the form from which he had been reading on to the sharpened piece of telegraph wire which, already crowded with a sheaf of similar flimsies, stuck out from the table edge. These were the messages despatched and done with. On the table, weighted down by a clip of cartridges, and now much decreased, there still remained the pile which had to be sent.

The halt was welcome to the telegraphist's cramped and aching hand. The sun had gone down, yet the atmosphere was still stuffy and pulsed with the hateful irregularity of the Morse code and its maddening dot-dot-dash, dot-dash-dot. To the tired soldier everything seemed to

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move to its measure ; his very head throbbed in a dance of longs and shorts. The day had been sweltering, and he had been on duty for many hours of great pressure, for headquarters were short-handed owing to sickness. He felt stale and dizzy and almost apathetic, having long been denied the stimulus of any interest in his task. He knew, of course, of the huge concentration and great movement of troops that was going on, but most of his work this day had consisted in the transmission of cipher messages, which conveyed no more to him than to the key he pressed, and the strain of accurately signalling endless streams of mere groups of letters was deadening to the intellect. He could not understand, and he did not care : he was now incapable of feeling anything except anxiety to avoid errors and a desire to reach the bottom of the now small pile of flimsies on the table. They represented, save for unexpected contingencies, the end of his particular job for that night. After them would be rest—perhaps sleep.

He yawned and stretched again : the bumping of his head against the dew-tautened wall of the tent sounding like a tap on a bass drum and disturbing the clusters of flies higher up. The canvas was moist and pleasantly cool : he rubbed the back of his head against it, unconsciously following the jerky rhythm which in that enclosed space was all-pervading. He continued with closed eyes, his thoughts far away—perhaps of home, of wife and children, or possibly only of equally distant beer—until a half-smoked cigarette falling from behind his ear recalled him to duty.

It was getting dark. He rose, picked up the cigarette, and from a pocket of the jacket lying on the floor, where he had placed them for shelter from the sun's rays, he drew out two candles. But, in spite of his forethought,

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the mid-day heat had been too much, and it was a sorry couple of dips that he produced. He lit them, took up the next message and seized the key. "Click-click, click-click, click-click." The jerky restless noise recommenced, drowning all other sounds.

The candles grew dim for want of snuffing, the flames flickered as some spluttering moth singed with horrid smell ; but the man paid no heed. He was nearing his rest.

From two other tents close by, which also had wires leading to them, similar sounds were proceeding, and from one of the first-floor windows of the inn behind there issued the comparatively soothing rattle of a typewriter. Beyond, in the copse, a gentle breeze rustled. Suddenly the night air was split—"Brrrp-Brrp-Brrrrp"—by a loud ripping sound. Startling in its clear-cut intensity, it continued in a monstrous replica of the same cadence tapped out so daintily, if irritatingly, by the key in the tent.

Was there no escape from the cursed code ?

These brutal gashes of sound without reticence were from the spark of the 'Wireless' as it sent its waves cleaving their way through the night to many miles' distance—the noise of their departure a vague measure of their impetus. Though purposely placed at some distance from the house, the installation was scarcely far enough away for the comfort of any of its occupants, certainly not far enough for the exasperated staff trying to work within.

Presently the noise in the telegraphist's tent stopped, and the light inside ceased to glow through the canvas. The man came out of the tent, and curling himself up in a blanket, lay down in the opening with his head outside, to get the benefit of the mere breath of air—scarcely more than a sigh in the tree-tops.

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His bad time was done, for as far as he was concerned the great concentration was over. Without even a curse at the grinding rattle of the wireless, he turned over and fell dead asleep, the cigarette still behind his ear.

II.

Not fifty yards from where the telegraphist lay sleeping, another man was experiencing a feeling of relief far deeper than anything felt by that tired soldier. This other man was the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief, who was now sitting in the porch of the little inn—his present headquarters, as was shown by the three red lamps in front. He was a middle-sized, thick-set man; but beyond this and the expression of utter abandonment of body and mind conveyed by his attitude, it was too dark to distinguish much of his personal appearance. As he sat alone in the gloom, the slow and regular glow of his cigar-end showed that the smoker was very much at ease. After a few moments he rose from his chair to ring a hand-bell on the table, and the slight stiffness, or rather a lack of elasticity in his movements, suggested that he was well over middle-age, possibly a trifle old for the strenuous life demanded by field service. A young staff-officer came out.

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Have you got the ‘ move complete ’ reports in from the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Divisions yet ? ”

“ The Fifteenth is in, but not the Sixteenth.”

“ When do you expect that ? ”

“ In about two hours, if there is no hitch.”

“ What’s the time now ? ”

“ Nine-thirty, sir.”

“ Well, tell the chief staff-officer, please, that I wish to

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see him. No--don't disturb him now; tell him that I should like the 'future' map completed up to time, to be in my room at midnight. The Chief of Staff returns to-night, and I wish to show it to him."

The young officer turned to go, too well-trained to show any surprise. He had shared the common idea that the Chief of Staff had died in hospital a week ago.

"Stay. If, while I have the map, any fresh move reports of importance should come in, let me know."

"Very good, sir."

Again alone, the Field-Marshal went on smoking. How fit he felt! He had but recently shaved and tubbed, and that delicious feeling of comfort, which a more or less precarious attainment of such luxuries makes so grateful, pervaded his being; his chin was smooth and smelt of soap. How well his cigar drew! Yet during the last few days he had tried smoke after smoke from the same box, only to throw them away in disgust. His dinner also had been quite good, and now the breeze, faint as it was, felt most refreshing after the long hot day. In fact, all things seemed to have entered into a conspiracy to please, and all was going well.

In some ways the Commander was as direct as his bull neck implied, and as simple as he was direct. But, with the defects of his qualities, he sadly lacked *finesse* and imagination, and consequently did not at all realise that the taste of the inferior dinner, the aroma of his usual cigar, even the caress of the feeble breeze—the whole rosy outlook at this moment—were the outward physical signs of a mental and moral reaction. He had just come through a very bad time, and though it would be hardly correct to say that he felt like the master of a vessel entering port after a stormy voyage, for he was by no

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means near port, yet the fog had lifted, he could take his bearings and knew where port lay.

The responsibilities of supreme command and the imminence of a great battle—he was commanding an army in the presence of the enemy—usually had no terrors for his stolid mind ; but on this occasion there had been the element of entire novelty in the situation, and in facing it he had been deprived of his chief source of inspiration.

He was placed in the position which, of all others, had most terrors for him—that of inactively awaiting the action of others. Against his will, against his principles and against the whole bias of his mind, he had been forced to act on the defensive. Up till now he had always been able to assume the offensive. The contrary *rôle*, with its loss of initiative, its mystery and its suspense, was consequently all the more dreadful. Though, by all the canons of the military art, his present force was far too weak to attack, it was fairly strong in defence ; quite enough so, could only the point of the enemy's intended attack be discovered in time for the delivery of a crushing counterstroke. But it was not strong enough for an onslaught in an unforeseen direction to be resisted. To retain equal strength in every part was to court certain defeat : to keep a large central reserve ready to be moved to any threatened spot was out of the question : the only course was to mass beforehand where the attack would fall. This needed no imagination : it was obvious, and without hesitation the Commander had decided upon the third course, for it appealed to his instincts, besides being correct in principle. His mind was set upon crushing the enemy, and this gave the only chance. If he could only discover where the enemy were going to attack—he was not able to offer a bait, or indeed any inducement

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towards any special spot—he could spin his web in the right corner, nurse the attack, lead it on until it was well within the meshes of his web and then—even his appetite for the offensive might be glutted. But where to spin the web?

To the north lay the enemy, about to advance. The position which the Field-Marshal held extended for some fifty miles from east to west. Naturally strong, it had been further strengthened during the period of occupation by every resource of fortification. The west, owing to its topographical features, was absolutely secure: elsewhere, except in two places, the position was safe enough. The only danger-spots were in the centre and on the east, but they were only dangerous in the event of the unforeseen advance of the enemy. So far this was all absolutely plain, but unluckily there was, in a tactical sense, absolutely no difference between these two points. There was no intrinsic reason why the centre should be attacked more than the east, or *vice versâ*, and therefore no hint for guidance, no basis for a scheme of defence.

For some days now the Commander-in-Chief and his staff had been at the old game of collecting intelligence—official reports, spies' reports, rumours—and endeavouring to sift out the improbable from the impossible, the possible from the improbable, and the probable from the possible, in order to obtain some foundation on which to build. This was nothing new to the Commander; but what was novel and disquieting was that, having formed a basis of probabilities and erected thereupon an edifice of future action, he could not proceed or force the pace—he still had to await the lead. From day to day the burden of information varied. Now it pointed to the centre being threatened, now it veered round and gave the impression that the east was the crucial spot.

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The Field-Marshal was a capable man and a strong man, but, as his movements showed, he was ageing. Tried veteran though he was, his brain, always more solid than subtle or brilliant, was not now what it had been. Of a virile and masterful nature, he had won success and the confidence of his nation by systematically following up one definite line where smaller men might have hesitated between alternatives: whatever course he followed he followed with his might. In political language, he was a 'whole-hogger.' So far, all the courses he had adopted had proved well chosen. In past years his had been the responsibility for execution, his would have been the responsibility for failure, and his, consequently, had been the reward for success. But his had not always been the mind which had conceived the plan adopted. As often happens, the thinker—the master mind—had not been the recognised leader. The man who had for long inspired the Field-Marshal was possessed of far more subtlety and imagination than the stolid, dogged individual now smoking in the hotel porch. This man was the General—his Chief of Staff—who had now been absent three weeks, wounded.

Friends for years, the two had together achieved success in other campaigns—success which, though placed entirely to the credit of the senior, was almost entirely in conception and partly in execution due to the junior, than whom there could not have been a more loyal subordinate. Now that he had been absent during this time of perplexity, the senior realised how much he had owed to the other's brain; how much he had relied upon him. He was not of an ungenerous nature, but this fact had never before been so driven home. The other had hitherto never been absent.

Within the last four days the signs had crystallised, and

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all pointed in one direction. Nearly every report corroborated the fact that there was a great massing of hostile troops right opposite the centre: it seemed an established fact. There were also other reports that hinted at a probable concentration of the foe on the east, farther away from the front, and therefore not so easy to locate. This news had now received so much confirmation that the Commander had decided it to be true, and had made up his plan of action accordingly. Once he had settled what to accept as fact, it had not taken him long to make his deductions, for he knew the general against whom he was fighting. Indeed it was his estimate of his opponent's character that had almost entirely guided his calculations. In spite of his natural preference for the concrete as opposed to the abstract, and of his repugnance to the metaphysical, he had learnt to attach value to the personal factor. Psychology was a hobby, almost a mania, with the absent Chief of Staff, and so great was his personal magnetism that the senior had to a certain extent become saturated with his subordinate's theory. Moreover, he had nothing else to go upon.

The enemy's great force in front was a feint. No one but a fool would show strength where the real effort was to be made. His opponent was no fool—he knew him to be a hard-headed, straightforward, sound fighter. Yes—the threat in the centre was not to be feared—it was the vague impalpable force hovering opposite his right, on the east, that was the danger.

Having worked this out to his satisfaction, all his energy, which was immense, and all the efforts of his staff, had, during the last two days, been devoted to the dispositions necessary in order to meet—to annihilate—this main attack of the foe. The redistribution had been going on for two days and was now almost complete. Not only

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had he discovered his opponent's intentions, but he had almost woven his web in the proper corner : next morning would see it complete to the last thread. True, he was deeply committed by his dispositions, for he could not now have met a sudden attack on his centre, in spite of superior communications and interior lines ; but he was so certain of his premises that this did not worry him. The great suspense was over. He had made up his mind, all measures had been taken, as far as was humanly possible, and last, but not least, his trusty lieutenant, the Chief of Staff, was returning to duty this evening : would soon be beside him to confer and to confirm. Yes—it could not be disguised—to confirm.

The cigar did indeed smoke well. So satisfied was the Commander, and withal so comfortably weary, that, like the telegraph operator, he too might have fallen asleep had not the faint hoot of a motor horn aroused him. The horn again sounded, closer : he heard the whir of a motor rapidly approaching, and the road was lit in the glare of acetylene as a large car drew up suddenly. Out of it stepped a tall man in goggles, wearing a military greatcoat perfectly white with dust.

Half an hour later the two were still sitting in the room.

"First-class, sir ; I quite see. Couldn't be more clear. We know our opponent, I think, and the east is certainly where he'll attack. Moves going all right ? "

"Yes ; the whole should be in position to-morrow morning. We've nothing to do here now, the last of my orders went out this evening. I have been actually loafing."

"Splendid, splendid," said the other almost gushingly, at last recollecting to take off the goggles, which he had merely pushed up upon entering. As he did so the extreme

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plainness of the face was revealed. A diagonal purple streak across the angle of the forehead did not improve its appearance.

"I'm quite fit again and up to any amount of work—dying for it." As he spoke and moved in a nervous jerky way, his face worked. He was an ugly man.

"Glad to hear it, but there is nothing—absolutely nothing—to do at present. Everything is nearly ready."

"Almost *archiprêt*, in fact?" said the Chief of Staff.

But the other did not quite follow: he was not very quick. He said "Eh?"

"Ready, sir, quite ready?"

"Yes, I said so. In half an hour we shall have a 'future' map in here, and you can see the final position of the troops. In the meantime have a wash and get some food; I'll run through these despatches." He looked at his assistant almost sentimentally—"It's good to see you again. That obituary notice startled me a bit, though."

"Oh, that? Yes, it may sound conceited, but I had that put in myself, on the off chance of its getting round to *them*. It won't do much harm if the old man opposite"—he waved his hand vaguely round the room—"thinks that I am—gone. Eh?"

The Field-Marshal really chuckled. He was literally purring with content. His conception had been indirectly and tactfully, but none the less actually, approved: for the execution he needed no approval.

Both were smiling—the Commander because his scheme had been accepted by his subordinate, the subordinate because he was sympathetic and liked his chief, and because he had insight and knew why the old man was smiling.

There was a step at the door, and a senior officer of the General Staff entered quickly. "You must see this

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sir," he said to the Field-Marshal, as he handed him a paper.

The business must have been very pressing, for the last-comer was too perturbed to be startled by the resurrection of the defunct Chief of Staff now looking at him so pleasantly across the table.

The Commander-in-Chief read the message deliberately, then re-read it. When he handed the slip of paper to the Chief of Staff all the complacency had faded from his face.

There was no deliberation about the latter's perusal. When he returned the paper he, too, had ceased to smile.

III.

The two were again alone, the Field-Marshal glum and silent, the Chief of Staff striding up and down the room and whistling under his breath in that dreary way which may betoken consternation, astonishment, but not joy.

The little paper which had so upset them did not bear a long message. On the top was the despatch from headquarters at home typed out in cipher. The message was not from anywhere in the theatre of war—it had come all the way from the capital, presumably originating in the enemy's. Underneath was the transcription. The purport of it was that the commander against whom they were fighting had been dead for two days, and had been succeeded by a junior, practically unknown, officer, whose name was given. The wire concluded : " This is absolutely authentic. We know nothing of new man."

For some minutes neither spoke, for both felt the blow : the one more keenly from a naturally more personal point of view, because of all his efforts and scheming of the last few days ; the other, untouched by such considera-

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tions, could look at the matter in better perspective. Nevertheless, he seemed now far the more excited of the two.

The blow was too cruel for even the Field-Marshal to bear quite unmoved—it was absolute upheaval. The mind he had gauged, whose workings he thought he knew so well, had for two days ceased to exist! For more than forty-eight hours he had been pitting himself against a fresh brain, a strange will—an unknown quantity! His plans might be good or they might be worth nothing, for nothing did he know of the new personality. In his Intelligence Bureau were pigeon-holes for all the likely seniors on the other side, and in them *dossiers* full of information. For this unknown man there was not only no *dossier*—there was not even a pigeon-hole! Such an appointment seemed unthinkable, and yet the wire was explicit—fatally so—and the information beyond doubt correct. It was a facer; his mind was blank. Two things only did he at once realise, that this news probably nullified all his efforts, and that he was hopelessly at sea again, more so than ever. He sat there sullen. As is the case with some stolid natures, a reverse only made him sulky and obstinate. The expression on his face was now almost mulish.

The other, with the more resilient mind, was the first to speak.

“What was this man’s name, sir?”

“What does that matter? We don’t know him.” The tone of irritation betrayed age.

“I think I know something.”

“Very well, read it again yourself,” grunted the senior, almost throwing the slip over to him. “I am not sure I know how to pronounce his outlandish name.”

The General snatched up the paper, re-read it greedily

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and then muttered: "There is one letter more, but it must be the same." Turning, he continued: "Have you ever met him, sir?"

"Yes, I believe I have. I once met a man in their service with a name very like that, but it was ages ago—when I was attaché in their capital, in fact——"

"By——! Have you? What was he like?" broke in the General in a shout, excitement conquering his manners.

"Good heavens, man, what are you shouting for? What do his looks matter? I never knew him."

"I apologise, sir; I'm afraid I was rather excited," responded the other, suddenly calm as his chief became the reverse, "but I do believe he is a man I once knew, and I want to fix it."

The Field-Marshal's childishness died away: he knew the other's worth.

"Well, well, if that's it. Let me see—it was so long ago, I only recollect the general impression he gave was unpleasing. Oh, yes—I remember now, he had red hair—bushy red hair."

"Yes?" in a suppressed voice.

"Do you want more?"

The other nodded.

"He had, I think, a foxy look—long pointed nose."

"Yes?"

"I can tell no more. He was an inferior sort of fellow. I did not know him well, and didn't want to."

The Chief of Staff now seemed suddenly and unaccountably pleased with himself. "That is enough: three corroborative details would fix it sufficiently for a bookmaker—it is a certainty. That's my man! Can you spare half an hour, sir? I mean, can you wait half an hour before taking any steps, and let things run on as they

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are ? ” His eye twinkled ; he knew the answer before it came.

“ Wait half an hour ? Wait half a year ! We don’t know what to do now, and I don’t see how we shall know in twenty half-hours ! ”

“ Yes, I hope we shall, sir. Give me half an hour with a smoke in the porch and I’ll give you that man’s nature, and we shall know which way he is going to jump—centre or east. Eh ? ”

“ Very well,” was the querulous assent. “ I only hope you succeed. A nice mess this personal equation business has landed us in now ! ” But the General had disappeared.

Half an hour is not much time in which to recall the events of forty years ago.

IV.

The Chief of Staff sat deep in thought, trying to recall a now far-distant epoch of his past life—his schoolboy days. Slowly it came back to him, bit by bit, each reminiscence of the old life drawing another in its train. He recollected the house, the masters and many of those utterly unimportant details which cling to the memory—the shape of the cracks in the dormitory ceiling at which he used to stare on the late Sunday mornings, the hot stuffy smell of the schoolroom on a summer afternoon, even the taste of the pale and watered ink with which he used to cover his fingers. He recalled many of his school-fellows, amongst them one rather older than himself—a foreigner. There were a good many foreigners at that school. Partly owing to his nationality, but more to his disposition, this boy was heartily disliked. He was called the ‘ Ferret.’ Yes, yes, he now well remembered the

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Ferret—his thick crop of stiff red hair, his pale face, pale eyes, and, above all, his pointed nose, with a dividing line down its tip, which was always pink and quivering like a young rat's. Yes, he remembered him. What a curious beast he was: a bit of a sportsman too in his own way, but it was not the way of others. Reserved, untruthful and conceited—a disconcerting element and a perpetual mystery to the boys as well as to the masters. There were other sneaks, other liars, other queer youths at the school, which was mixed enough, but their characters were transparent in comparison with the Ferret's. His chief peculiarity was that though he sometimes lied, he often told the truth. It was also his success, for no one knew which way to take him, and he always attained his object when he wished to deceive.

The General had arrived so far step by step, but it was not enough. There was something more he wished to recall, some special incident which would give the complete clue to his schoolfellow's character. Strive as he would, and though he felt it at the back of his mind, he could not entice this special reminiscence from its cell in his brain. It was most exasperating. As he fidgeted he felt for the first time attacks of the midges hovering about his head: he lit a cigar in self-defence, in the hope also that perhaps it might soothe his nerves and make his memory work.

But no. He could not recall this thing. He looked at his watch. Time was going, and here he was within an ace of the clue to the situation, the key to victory and perhaps to the fate of a nation for generations.

Always excitable and impatient, he now made no effort to keep calm even in the hope of beguiling his memory. The wound in his head began to throb. Swearing softly, he got out of his chair, strode across the road and started

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to walk into the little plantation on the other side, but had not gone ten paces before his head struck the branch of a tree with a force that made him reel. He stopped muttering, and heard some heavy object fall into the long grass at his feet. He was dizzy, and without any reason stooped and picked up the thing. It was an unripe apple. Absently placing it to his nose, he sniffed.

Like a flash the scent took him back across the space of years—back, back to the dusty class-room. It was afternoon, and the room smelt strong of apples.

The General stood petrified, apple to nostril, eyes closed, for now he was getting near it. Yes, the schoolroom reeked of apple ; there were apple-cores lying all about and numerous boys munching. One—the Ferret—approached him and jeeringly offered him a core ; he could remember the nasty expression—the pink twitching nose. Now he had it !

As he stood there in the dark in that orchard the smell of the apple projected a series of pictures upon his mental retina as clear as those of a cinematograph, and now they came in logical, chronological sequence.

He well remembered that autumn afternoon when his boyish heart had been torn between two desires—either to go to a certain orchard to get the last of some special apples, or else to pay a visit to an old lady who gave teas that were celebrated. He could not do both things. He wanted the tea ; but of the whole school he and the Ferret alone knew of this special apple-tree, and he dared not pay the visit in case the other should clear off the fruit. If the Ferret would wait, he could have his good tea ; if not, it would have to be postponed. He met the Ferret and asked him point-blank if he was going for the fruit. He could recall the very words of the puzzling answer, given with a disconcerting smile—

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"Of course I am, youngster. Yes, get everyone of them, and sell what I can't eat. What d'you think?"

This was so obviously chaff that he went off to pay the visit and eat his tea with a light heart.

The old dame was not at home. He got no tea, and returned cold, tired and hungry—to be offered a gnawed apple-core in the schoolroom. He could see the cores now lying about the room and almost feel the hail of shiny pips with which he was bombarded.

His subsequent onslaught on the Ferret had only resulted in his own discomfiture. But the explanation?

Ah, yes! It was when he got his hamper. He had been very keen to learn the Ferret's system of misleading people better by truth than by lies, and had finally extracted a promise of revelation in exchange for a cake, a cake on top of which the almonds simply jostled, and a two-bladed pocket-knife with a shiny black handle. Having taken payment in kind beforehand and eaten one-half of the price, the Ferret had one night—the last night but one of the term—come and sat on the edge of his bed and told him his Theory of Scoring, as he called it. How unpleasant his pale face had looked in the moonlight, all checkered by the shadows of the bars of the diamond-paned window, and how glibly he had talked as he ran his hands through his fiery hair.

He did not mind giving his theory away, he had said, for it was his last term. To *get on* it was necessary to be ahead of everyone else, to anticipate what they would think or would do, to know their natures, and he added a good deal more stuff which then appeared to be sheer nonsense. He concluded by saying that lying—good lying—was useful in moderation, and his last words were: "To a stranger I never lie till I am forced—then I lie well; the other man thinks I am telling the truth—

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and is misled. That's the First Degree of Cunning. Next time I wish to deceive that man, I tell the truth. He, of course thinks that I am lying, and so is again misled—the Second Degree. If I wish to——” But his listener had had enough of the Ferret's rubbish and cut him short. How angry he had been, for he did not understand this rigmarole and thought it nonsense. How he had vainly demanded his knife back—the cake was eaten—and how he had received another thrashing in his endeavour to get it. It all came back now so clearly.

The Ferret had departed next day but one, and he had never seen him again or heard of him since ; but the way in which he had been, as he considered, cheated out of his knife had long rankled. It was not for some years afterwards that he had seen any sense in his philosophy.

That was the Ferret with his ‘ First and Second Degree.’ If this man now against them were the Ferret, and there could be no doubt of it, his nature would at bottom, at the crises of life, be the same. Given the occasion, he would act in the same way. The General looked at his watch, for he was going to take his full time in considering the matter, relit his smoke and paced up and down the dusty road, again running the Ferret's philosophy over in his mind to make absolutely certain. As he did this the humour of the situation gradually struck him—the incongruity between the immense issues at stake and the things he was trying to recall appeared ghastly, then ludicrous. He smiled. His appreciation of the gravity of affairs and his vindictive feelings were struggling against his strong sense of humour. It was only after some effort that he calmed himself sufficiently to go in and see his Chief. The task before him of explaining this thing to his unimaginative senior was sufficiently

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hard without prejudicing himself in the other's eyes by any misplaced levity.

Throwing away his cigar, he went towards the house with a firm step, and as he crossed the beams of the head-quarter lanterns it was not a pleasant face that flashed out three times crimson against the darkness.

v.

It was past midnight, and the Field-Marshal was sadly studying the fully flagged map now hung up on the wall of his private room.

From a short distance the sheet of paper gave a very good pictorial representation of what the positions of the two forces would be next day. One might have supposed that a pattern had been traced on it in some sweet and sticky substance upon which large coloured flies had settled and stuck. Running about due east and west in a curve with its convexity northwards, were two lines of these flies, blue and yellow, facing each other. In the yellow were two conspicuous clusters or knots, one right up on the line towards the centre, and the other much thicker, towards the eastern end and some way back from the front. These were the enemy's concentrations; that on the centre, ascertained and visible—the sham attack; the other, conjectured only—the real attack. The blue flies were slightly crowded at each end of the line where it curled back, and, to meet the real attack, there was a dense cloud on the east retired from the front. The position of this concentration was such that, should the opposite crowd of yellows press forward and penetrate the blue line, they would in their turn be fallen upon and overwhelmed.

This gaudy picture was the result of deep calculation

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and immense work on the part of its artists—the general staff at headquarters, and of superhuman efforts on the part of the troops—the blue flies.

The old man gazed steadily at it. Though its colour scheme was perhaps a trifle crude, yet till a short half-hour ago its composition and values had seemed so excellent—and now, possibly all this labour had been in vain, or even worse than in vain.

A quick step outside and the Chief of Staff entered with an impetuosity strange in a tired and convalescent man at this time of night.

“ Well ? ”

“ Now, sir, I can tell you something definite. I said I knew him of the red hair. I have now placed him exactly, and can give you the *man*.”

“ What’s the use ? Tell me what he’s going to do, not what he is like.”

“ Quite so. I will give you the boy, his nature, and the way his mind worked. This will give us his personal equation ; from that——”

“ Yes, I see ; but I am afraid, my dear fellow, you are still as madly keen as ever on the ‘ personal equation.’ I am a bit shaken in my belief—but go on, please.”

The two sat down facing each other across the table, a candle on either hand, while the General as clearly and as briefly as possible and without details laid bare to his Chief the Ferret’s soul—as he estimated it.

During his bald statement he laboured under the effort of intense restraint, for however natural the different steps by which his memory worked had appeared to him when trying to recall his school-days, they did not well lend themselves to words. Now he was talking to another man—an especially stolid man—the contrast between his boyish escapades—apples, pocket-knives and cakes—and

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the supreme gravity of the present situation struck him with increased force. It was all he could do to keep from laughing, for his self-control, through the present and past tension on his nerves, was no longer what it had been. He already saw something more than interested wonder in the eyes of his matter-of-fact Chief, and this look warned him off any picturesque details. With an effort he at last logically worked up to his end, and finished almost calmly—

“That was the boy, sir, and that must be a good deal of the man!”

There was silence for a few moments.

“Yes, knowledge like that has been used in war, certainly——”

“Since the days of Hannibal, at the very least.”

“I have also heard something of that theory of cunning before,” mused the senior.

“Probably. One Bacon once wrote on the subject. That’s what made me think that there was more in it than I had first imagined, and that perhaps after all I had not let that knife go so cheap——”

He stopped with a jerk and a suppressed snigger which made him cough.

“Knife? What knife?”

“Nothing, sir; that’s quite another matter, which does not at all concern the question,” was the hasty reply. Fortunately the Field-Marshal had no petty curiosity and did not press the point; but he eyed his friend keenly before he continued—

“Now, are we quite sure that this man is the Ferret—your Ferret?”

“It must be—same name, same red hair, same foxy nose. These corroborative facts—*independent details*—make a mathematical certainty. In fact, all works out

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so pat that it smacks of the strawberry-mark and the long-lost br-r-r-other of the play ! ”

“ Yes, so I was thinking.”

“ However, that does not vitiate facts. You have seen the man yourself—indeed *you* gave me the details, so they have not been imagined by a visionary faddist to fit in with some preconceived theory.”

“ Yes, the appearance is certainly correct. I knew the man well by sight.”

“ And I knew the boy by sight, and all through.”

“ Well, well. It may be—it may be. Anyway, we have nothing else.” He sighed. “ Supposing this is the Ferret, and that he is unchanged—to come to actualities—what then ? It means, of course, that—that——”

The quicker nature here broke in—“ That as he has not fought against you before, and as you do not know him, he will deceive you in the simplest way ; in other words, he will use the First Degree. For two days now he has carried on his predecessor’s dispositions and is visibly, nay blatantly, massing against your centre ”—he waved his hand in an excited gesture at the map ; as he did so his senior noticed, to his bewilderment, that he was clutching a green apple—“ therefore he will not attack there. He will attack our right !!! ”

The Field-Marshal pondered. This was going quick with a vengeance, and his mind worked more slowly than that of his friend. As he thought over it, half-carried away by the other’s personality and fervour, his eyes were fixed on the apple.

“ M’ yes, so it appears to work out. But how about you ? Won’t he know you are here—you, his old school-fellow ? ”

“ You forget that I am dead ! That idea of mine may be our trump-card.”

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" Yes, I forgot that. It turns out luckily though, for our present arrangements stand good, and we can carry on as we are doing. It is more than lucky, it is providential ; I doubt if we should now have time to alter. I don't see how we can do better than work on your theory—wild though it seems. Right or wrong, we must choose a course and follow it through unreservedly. We may be wrong—that will mean failure, if not defeat ; but if we simply wait, equally strong all along the line, for a further sign of the enemy's intentions, we are *certain* of failure." He paused. " Yes, I'll do it. We will carry on as we are against a real attack on our right." He sighed again—more from relief than from anything else.

" It's the obvious course, I think, sir."

" We can do no more at present—everything is in train. Thank God it works out this way ! Of course it pans out as I thought all along, but that despatch certainly did upset me for a bit. I was like a ship without a compass." His tone had again become cheerful, almost smug, for he had something tangible to fight against, and having again come to a conclusion he again ceased to fear. He continued : " But it certainly does seem far-fetched. The tactical scheme of an army based on what a schoolboy once said many years ago ! " He chuckled.

The other did not reply ; the older man's last remarks reawakened his sense of the ludicrous, so far successfully repressed ; he could not speak. He felt his self-control slipping away.

The Field-Marshal, still chuckling, carefully chose a cigar from his case, and drew from his pocket a knife—a two-bladed knife with a black horn handle, just like— This was too much. The General began to giggle.

" Eh ? " said the other without looking up.

" Hee-hee-hee," was the reply.

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The Field-Marshal gazed in surprise at his friend—surprise mingled with misgiving, for this giggling, coupled to the reasonless clutch on an unripe apple, seemed to denote some lack of balance—perhaps his wound ?

“ Ha-ha-ha ”—and like an upheaval of nature the reaction took place. The General roared. He lay back in his chair and roared louder. He walked up and down the room, holding the apple at arm’s-length, and shrieked in idiotic tones—

“ A pocket-knife — a *two-bladed* pocket-knife, apples and a cake ! ”

The Field-Marshal dropped his cigar and stood up. His first feeling was one of extreme anger, for it certainly looked as if his old friend was presuming on their mutual affection in order to play the fool at a most inopportune moment ; but he had never known him to be a practical joker. A second glance showed him that there was no fooling here, and his look changed to one of pity for his overwrought subordinate. Men often get unstrung on active service, and he was not surprised at this case, for before being wounded the strain on the Chief of Staff had been terrible, and for such a highly strung man to start work again so soon after recovery was most unwise : those quick nervous men will always wear themselves to bits. The shrieks of the hysterical General were now ringing through the night, and one or two officers came running in to ascertain the cause of the uproar. Laying the now panting man on the floor, they tore open his collar and threw water over him. Finally bursting into tears, he recovered as quickly as he had broken down. As he began a string of profuse but unnecessary apologies—for a nervous breakdown is common enough—the other officers quietly withdrew.

The two sat on for some minutes, while the sufferer

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collected himself. The Field-Marshal's qualms as to the other's sanity had now vanished, and he cordially assented when the General got up, saying—

“ If you have done with me, sir, I think I will try and snatch some sleep.”

“ Yes, certainly ; ” and he added as the other reached the door, “ get a sleep while you can : you may have no chance to-morrow. Dream of how we shall defeat the Ferret—lying brute ! ”

Something in the tone of the last words made the hearer stop. From the phlegmatic Field-Marshal, even though he were worked up, they seemed spiteful, if not abusive.

He turned his head. “ Why do *you* call him a lying brute, sir ? ”

“ Good Lord, man, haven't you been spending the best part of half an hour trying to convince me of his lying character ? ”

“ Yes, certainly. *I* know him to be a lying brute, but you do not. You speak bitterly, as if you had some personal reason for calling him that. Have you ? ”

“ Why, yes, I have. All this talk about the fellow has reminded me of a good deal that I had forgotten. The man did lie to me badly once when I was attaché—about something or other, I don't——”

The other whipped round. “ Has lied to you ? ”

“ Yes, yes, I tell you. He ——” but the Field-Marshal did not finish, for the General, glaring fiercely, stalked slowly up to the table and hit it such a blow with his clenched fist that the candles jumped out of their sockets and fell over still burning. He then thrust his face across the table to within a few inches of his astonished senior's and said in the crescendo whisper of forced calm—

“ Do—you—know—sir—what—that—*means* ? ”

The elder man's fears for his friend's reason returned in

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ten-fold force. Certainly, as he stood there in the gloom with his face covered with a slime composed of dust and water, leaning across the table, and his clenched fist—still holding the apple—in a pool of rapidly congealing candle-grease, he looked almost dangerous.

The Field-Marshal held on to his chair. He was momentarily at a loss. The other answered his own question.

“That was his first bout with you!”

“Oh! Now I see what you are driving at; but he will never remember.”

“Won’t he? *He* always remembers everything, and will think you do too.”

“Then——?”

“He will play his Second Degree—and—will—attack—the—CENTRE!”

“Ah!”

.
There was no more sleep for the tired telegraphist or for anyone else at headquarters that night. War is a Juggernaut that reckes not of the weariness of individuals, and it was high noon next day before the click of the typewriters, the tap of telegraph keys and the smack of the ‘wireless’ had abated. By that time, too, many of the pretty blue flies on the map might have been seen in the sunlight to have danced round to a fresh pattern—nearer the centre of the picture.

VI.

Three mornings later. In response to the clamour of the guns the weather has broken. Though the rain has tailed off into drizzle, the ground is still sopping and the bushes drip sadly as the damp breeze shakes them.

Behind the wayside railway station, in the centre of

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the valley, rises a circle of purple hills, and above and beyond them again heavy clouds are hanging. A thread of blue smoke, bullied by the rain, quivers up from the station buildings, and the sodden flag hanging limp from its staff close by gives an occasional sad flap as a puff of air galvanises it into momentary life. Though sodden with rain, its colours can be recognised as those of the Field-Marshal's headquarters—now moved on far from the village inn. A cavalcade winds slowly over the hills to the left, and approaches. As they get closer it can be seen that nearly all the bedraggled men composing it are officers, though not all their horses are officers' mounts. They must indeed have been scratched together anyhow. Some are troop horses, others are most palpable of 'hairies' which have long known the drag of gun or waggon, but all are alike in their weary dejection as they stumble over rocks and slither down the slippery clay of the hillside. In spite of their evident fatigue and discomfort an air of smothered satisfaction sits on the faces of all but a few of the party. The dejected ones are riding in the centre; as far as the universal coating of mud allows of comparison they appear to be wearing a different uniform. At their head rides a slight man, hatless, and as he turns his head his bushy crop of red hair presents the only spot of colour in the sombre picture. Though his eyes are cast down and the whole of his sharp-featured face is expressive of hopeless perplexity, yet he supplies also the only touch of briskness, for in spite of the damp his moustache retains its stiff upward curl. This man is the captured commander of the defeated army, who, with a few survivors from his staff, is on his way to surrender to his vanquisher.

As the cavalcade approaches the flagstaff the challenging neigh of a horse suddenly rings out from behind the house, and the air is filled with the shrill noise of the chorus in

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reply. Ears are pricked, nostrils quiver, bits jingle, and as regards horseflesh the appearance of the dismal party is transformed. A small knot of mounted men appears from behind the house. It is the Field-Marshal coming out to receive the surrender of his foe. A few moments and the parties halt as the leaders alone ride forward. Courteously they salute in silence, and then as the vanquished man faces his victor, perplexity is still stronger on his face than any other emotion. Then his glance passes the Field-Marshal and falls upon a tall man with a scarred face riding behind. It turns to a stare. A gleam of recognition, of comprehension—almost of relief—comes slowly into his tired eyes.

He recognises his real conqueror !

XI.

A CAMP OF INSTRUCTION.

PULLING at guns, prancing on horseback, plodding on foot, the many units of the force to be instructed have been for days, some of them for weeks, gradually closing on a certain bridge of boats crossing one of India's great rivers. A mile-wide stretch of glistening white sand—truly, one may say, all bed and no river. The latter, with neither the torrential rains of one season nor the melting snows of Nepal of another to feed it, has dwindled to a couple of meagre-looking channels, aggregating, let us say, no more than the Thames at Westminster Bridge. These are spanned by a bridge of boats, while again soaring high over the whole is a great iron-girder railway bridge, in colour an outrageous pink, for before taking on its winter coat of dull normal red it is clothing itself in an under-garment of pink paint.

With the coming of a clear frosty dawn begins the stream of transport ; and no greater misfortune can befall the impedimenta of an army than the passage, after an all-night march, of a wide stretch of sand.

Then begins, and will last for some hours, a scene of hideous clamour and apparent confusion.

Calm and patient alone amongst them all is the velvet-eyed ox, struggling on beneath his cruel-looking yoke till he can no more, and lies down. Tail-twisting and blows and howlings will at most effect a worried look on

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his placid face. He lies immovable, and his obdurate silence is eloquent and its meaning plain: "You will not move me. I am spent. Bring fatigue-parties to help me into camp." They are brought.

Later on, with the uprising of the sun, in rapid sequence arrive regiments, batteries, battalions, all at the bridge-head. Matters are in nowise improved. A train roars overhead in its pink cage. Let us hop into an open window and leave pandemonium behind us—the horse, foot, guns, carts, barrows, camels, mules, ponies, donkeys and the great and very motley throng of camp-followers all pressing over the creaking, swaying boats; let us leave the patient ox resting with his legs doubled up beneath him, and the vociferous old hen who hangs to a mule-load, tied by a leg to a string, and who has so hung, head down, all night, but who will soon be picketed to a peg in camp, and wandering at her tether oblivious of her recent troubles and ignorant of fate.

Sundown, and the river, lead-coloured in its snow-white bed, flows silent and deserted. The mass has extricated itself, and some hours since has reached its allotted bivouacs. A gaggle of geese in regular but ever-varying formation of wedge, line and single file passes overhead; the last alligator slides like a launched log off his basking-place into the water; and the hum of a great camp settling down for the night strikes pleasantly on the ear.

The sun is sinking in a beatified setting of his own rays, striking through a haze of dust and the smoke of a thousand bivouac fires. There is not a breath of wind, but the thermometer is not much above freezing-point and a heavy dew is falling.

Long and long ago, when military officers were idle, ignorant and extravagant, we called these gatherings 'Camps of Exercise'; and they were rightly so called,

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for there was sufficient out-of-door work to keep everyone hard and fit and eke a modicum of leisure to enjoy it all. But we have cast all such works of darkness to the devil, and when we now assemble ourselves together it is for no mere exercise of our vile bodies, but to instruct and exercise our minds. Hence the modern term 'Camps of Instruction.'

Long and long ago a city of canvas might have been seen on this very ground, where now scarce a half-dozen tents stand up above the blanket shelters and other rude contrivances to keep man warm and dry.

Huge pavilions variously adorned with potted plants and flowers and bunting, and by night coloured lanterns, with great store of whitewash to mark camps and boundaries, straw-littered streets to avoid dust, and mile-long rows of lamps, might then have delighted the eye. At this self-same hour of sundown warriors clad, some of them (heaven forgive the recollection!) in fine raiment, *not* uniform, would have been taking their ease in calling on neighbouring camps or receiving their friends in their own after a not too arduous day's soldiering. Bands might have even been playing, trumpets and bugles would certainly have been calling.

Now we are on 'service conditions': no bugle-calls are heard save those for *réveillé* and watch-setting, and these are only sounded by one regiment for the information of the rest. Lucky the man who can snatch a moment, after examining his horses' or his men's feet after a long day's work, to do a hurried 'gin-crawl.' This is an impolite term for a searching after short drinks, when such luxuries are rare, at camps other than one's own, towards evening.

Still there is more of a study to be made of bivouacs than ever there was when tents of stereotyped pattern

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were allowed to everybody ; and we can do no better than walk round and see them.

When half a mule is allowed to carry a man's kit and that of his servants, the whole cause and origin of checked waistcoats is at once made apparent—*i.e.*, the variety of tastes.

Here is Jones with his blankets laid out on the sand, and a waterproof sheet on top to keep them dry. Nothing more. Jones is also stained and stubbly. Smith, who lives next to him, has a natty little *tente d'abri*, with a suspicion of sheets showing under the blankets inside. Smith looks much better groomed than Jones. Now, how is it that Jones fares so much worse than Smith ? The answer to an old bivouacker is simple. If Smith has a little tent and plenty of bedding, he has gone without something that Jones, deeming more essential to his comfort, has brought, and that is probably a gun and cartridges.

Here another man has rigged up an excellent shelter from the sun by day or dew by night, but which would fly away in a wind and leak like a sieve in a downpour.

Another, in his precautions against possible rain, has brought both camp-bed and *tente d'abri*, but the latter is so small that he can barely thread himself into it head first with the aid of a shoehorn, and when in he must be nearly asphyxiated.

Lastly is the man—we call him the old soldier—who has everything for every possible contingency—a full mule-load, at the very least. Ask him no questions as to how he has managed it, for you will get no information. So far as his own comfort and welfare are concerned, the old soldier has nothing to learn at camps of instruction.

Four hundred blankets, eight hundred rifles and three thousand two hundred little pegs, and half an hour by

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the clock will see a whole infantry battalion housed ; but there is a lack of variety in this, and no expression of that individuality which we are bidden to cultivate nowadays.

We may note some rather *chic* things in shelters as we pass—tamarisk bushes, with a few armfuls of straw shaken over their feathery tops, and the occupants bedded down to perfection on the soft sand in which this bush flourishes.

But enough of bivouacs—we came here for instruction, and anyone can bivouac, or thinks he can, till he has tried it in the rain.

The programme for the next few days is the same : we rise from our watery nests—the dews being heavy—and again seek them at early hours, yet thank whatever gods there be for being left to sleep in peace without any night alarms. The hours of light, with a short interval for man and horse to water and feed, are taken up with drills incessant.

Wellingtonian noses, from much exposure to a never-clouded sun, are rapidly going at their tips, and even less historical features are looking angry. Rude health is the order of the day, yet hospitals are not quite empty. Masses of cavalry, led by fiery leaders through murky clouds of dust, must pay toll to Fortune ; and the plain is seen occasionally with a fallen horse and rider. It is, moreover, a country of wells—nearly every field has one lurking under cover of a young green crop in its corner. Now and again a horse with or without his rider will go down. Consequences are, however, surprisingly small. Here is a well twenty feet deep and dry : both man and mount have tumbled in. The former has been yanked out with his comrades' head-dresses, and is none the worse. But the horse lies jammed at the bottom, to all appearances deader than chevril. Material for getting him out, a

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weakly looking rope borrowed from a village. A man is lowered down and passes the rope round the horse, who is not so dead as he would have us believe. In a few minutes he is run up to the lip of the well, and there sticks kicking wildly. A hind-leg is quickly lassoed with a sowar's turban, and out he comes, neck and crop, literally, not a penny the worse and with scarcely a hair missing off his hide.

Then there is the railway line, bounded with a wire railing. There are certain troop horses called in the vernacular 'comers out of the ranks,' otherwise desperate bolters: not popular animals, nor nice to ride in a charge, with the best part of the other hand occupied with holding the lance or sword. Bad enough to ride with no wire-fence ahead. When the charge ends such horses are only beginning. As the pace slackens, like rockets they shoot out of the ranks, mad with the lust of doing anything but stop. See this one: the brigade has halted with a good hundred yards between it and the wire; but this 'comer out' rushes forward, past troop leaders, squadron leaders and the leader of the regiment, and takes the wire nicely with his chest. Horse and rider fall, a kicking heap, a good twelve yards inside the fence. The line wheels about and is off at a gallop, leaving the injured, if injured there be, to the tender mercies of the ferocious doolies who are ordered to be on all cavalry parade-grounds in readiness for these melancholy occasions.

While watering the horses at mid-day, at what looks like little more than a large puddle filled with pea-soup, down flounder a horse and rider. The former struggles ashore; the latter, weighed down by the rifle attached to his body, and despite the efforts of an officer who nearly shares a like fate, goes under. The water is two lances' lengths in depth, and no one can duck-dive to the bottom.

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It is nearly an hour before a grappling-iron can be obtained. The brigade moves off, leaving two doctors hard at work in a vain effort to restore life.

The preparatory phase of the camp is over. The force splits asunder—one half calls itself 'the Red force,' and mounts red patches in their head-dresses, the other side calls itself 'the Khakie force.' Being a day's march or more apart, hostilities at a given hour commence. Printed slips of paper circulate through the units and communicate to all the 'ideas'—*i.e.*, the 'general idea,' a brief statement of a military situation, given to both Reds and Khakies, which dominates the course of the manoeuvres throughout; and the 'special ideas,' a different one given to either side, detailing the military situation of that side, and leaving its commander to fulfil in his own way his particular mission. Neither side knows what the special idea of the other side is. The fog of war having thus been created, the Director of the manoeuvres takes his seat up aloft, where he can see through it all, pulls a string here or there to keep events going in the currents they should go in, able to throw in reinforcements, imaginary but none the less effectual, and generally to see that things so trend as to illustrate the truth and immutability of the laws of tactics and strategy. It is an annoying fact that if events are given too free a hand, and are left without interference to the arbitrament of individual leaders and blank cartridges, they have a dastardly habit of upsetting all accepted principles.

The man who imbibes more instruction than anyone else at these manoeuvres is the mess secretary. He has many mentors to see that he learns his lesson quickly and knows it thoroughly: with long and rapid marches, and no previous intimation as to where a regiment will be to-day, to-morrow, or the next day, he has mainly

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to cultivate the gentle art of second-sight. Until he has done so, it will be a game of blindman's-buff between the mess, the nearest railway station and the blindfolded mess secretary. He lives in an atmosphere of railway arrival notices, telegrams and despatch-riders, trying to get up his bread, his vegetables, or his soda-water, and sometimes failing. When things run short or go wrong, he need not wait till the general pow-wow to have his tactical mistakes pointed out to him. This friendly office will be done then and there. In vain will he descant on his insuperable difficulties ; in vain demonstrate that his supplies were awaiting the expected arrival of the regiment at X., where it ought to be ; in vain assert that he had wired to X station-master to forward the things immediately to Y., where the regiment was not expected to be, and ought not to be, but is. In vain will he show the reply from X station-master (a flurried gentleman out of Bengal, in petticoats and patent leather elastic-sided shoes), " Your esteemed telegram to hand. Just now I forward your valuable foods to Y station. But am much disconcerted by many generals and other officers raging frightfully and making similar request, with great anger and threatenings of report."

If that mess secretary is up to his work he will first tearfully, humbly press his thankless office on the loudest grumbler—a most effectual mouth-stopper—and then having on some previous occasion cast his bread or his soda-water or his beer on the waters of some other mess secretary in like straits, he will borrow what is required therefrom and tide over the difficulty.

Often we laugh at our native soldiers for their keenness over imaginary fighting : with them it is only one step short of the real thing, and stone-throwing has occurred. Therefore bayonets are never fixed nor lances couched

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lest worse may occur. We superior Britishers are really just as bad, we who know that the whole thing is humbug and often a farce. Colonel Z, as he leads his battalion in a desperate charge on an entrenched position, looks and feels and behaves just as he would be doing in the real thing.

Major Q is delighted that his field battery, acting as Horse Artillery, should have been able to keep with the cavalry over thirty miles of bad going across country, and would willingly do it again next day, despite the visibly altering condition of his magnificent teams.

Captain P, who in a charge over black-cotton soil has come a terrific purler and broken his horse's back (and read we the regulations never so cannily, he can never get a penny compensation), is heroically cheerful over his misfortunes.

There is one man, however, to whom this mimic warfare is a sad reality, and that is the cultivator. Although he is assured that his little fields of young barley are immensely improved by the passage of troops, he is quite sceptical on a point as to which he may perhaps be considered the best judge. But as to the opium there is no doubt. The poor peasant stands with hands raised in supplication as he sees his garden-like square of carefully fathered soil approached. It is no good : the unit is under fire, and, if it turned aside from this field, would only come across a score more—under a thousand ammunition boots, the hoofs of horses, and, worse than all, the deeply biting wheels of artillery. The field is effaced : not a green poppy-head remains. Compensation for damage effected during manœuvres is granted ; some of it may even reach the hands of the real sufferers, but the sight of those poor villagers bending over their devastated fields is one that lingers in the eye of memory.

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Where are all those battalions we saw leave camp this morning? Well, they are strung over the fields all about you. But you may say at once they are invisible, and it is no good looking for them. Even guns now get away out of sight of their targets and fire blindly at the bidding of a secret detective service, who point out the direction of enemies and tell the ranges. If you want to see anything you must ride for a moving cloud of dust some miles off, for that indicates a cavalry brigade; and until horses learn to go on their bellies and hide their amiable heads behind tufts of grass, the cavalry cannot help being the spectacular arm of the three.

There is an immense fascination, entirely unstaled by custom, in the sight of the steady onward sweep of masses or lines of mounted men. One knows well what havoc a small obstacle or a few bursting shells will cause in these seemingly unbreakable ranks; yet they appear, and always will appear, irresistible. And not less than the sight to the eye is the sound to the ear, or rather the blend of sounds—the muffled trampling of hoofs on soft soil, their continued hiss through the young crops and the dull rattle and occasional squeak of leather and steel. And the juice of crushed and trampled green crops sends up a strangely remindful pungent scent to the nose, and the nose speaks to the eye, and it says, “This is the pleasant smell of English turf trodden by the feet of multitudes watching a race meeting, or sports, or a cricket match. You can call up the scene, can’t you?” And the eyes in a trice place a picture before the mind.

Long and long ago camps of exercise finished, as they do now, with what is called a pow-wow. Whether this word is slang English or pure Chinese or what, yet remains to be discovered. But in those degenerate days, though there were criticisms and remarks, people generally went

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away after pow-wow with a pleasant warmth between the blades of the shoulders—a necessary result of back-slapping—and the next day there was a ‘spectacle’ (pronounced French-wise, please) at which serried ranks of warriors in scarlet, blue and other colours, freely garnished with that now almost obsolete material called gold-lace, marched past a high military dignitary and received the plaudits of assembled crowds. A whole day has even been given up to sports, mounted and foot. Horses and men, had they been properly worked, could never have been fit to gallop or run at such trivialities.

But we have changed all this. It is now, let us suppose, the last day of the manœuvres. Men have fought many hours, and are athirst. Far away is a hint of a bugle-call—nearer it sounds as it is repeated by every unit—it is the ‘cease fire,’ and shortly afterwards comes the ‘officers’ call.’

Haste we to the appointed place, watch the incoming of Reds and Khakies. It is the best part of an hour before all are gathered, and form a dense ring of brick-red faces, peeled noses and stained uniforms round the Director. He is now about to dispel what remains of the fog, and, notes and map in hand, is carrying on a murmured conversation with a recording staff-angel.

The Director’s is a difficult task. During the operations he has been able to see at best but a fraction of all that has gone on. Well is it if he remembers this, and that his conclusions must be drawn from the carefully collated reports of many umpires. He must deal in broad generalities, not dilate unduly on conspicuous and alluring trivialities. He has around him a congregation who are bound to listen to his sermon, but who have to be invited to clear themselves of the tactical backslidings of which he has

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accused some of them. Yet he must not be drawn into wordy duels in which he may possibly get the worst. The Director must be right and the other fellow wrong. Errors must be pointed out, yet feelings spared.

The Director sums up a situation and then says, "Now, Colonel Blank, what was your idea in acting as you did?" Colonel Blank exists in several varieties. One kind is immediately overcome by hearing his own voice in the midst of so large and critical an audience. However right he may have been, his guilty apologetic mien at once invites an unfavourable criticism, perhaps harshly delivered. Another—better quality—cares not a button for any man, narrates boldly and vividly all the wrong things he did, and by his fearless, slightly aggressive air, receives a verdict which may be unfavourable but must be at least polite.

A third—best quality—has a clever tongue, with clear head and suave manner to supply it with words and persuasiveness. Childlike he takes the Director into his innermost confidence—accepts his statements with the utmost deference, without pretending that they in the least affect the righteousness of his own cause. He comes off best.

The pow-wow ends with a few words of thanks for the zeal and energy that everyone has displayed.

Twenty-four hours later the country has again resumed the peace of centuries, and one which may last as long again. By road and rail all are hurrying to be 'in time for Christmas': married men to their firesides, bachelors to the duck and snipe, Thomas Atkins to his gaily decorated barrack-room and Jack Sepoy on ten days' leave to his home and winter crop.

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Alone the poor cultivator is left to mourn his ruined opium crop and trampled (but improved) cereals. Let us hope that the money which is granted for his compensation may reach him without the lessening influence of too many adhesive palms *en route*.

XII.

SNATTY.

"This 'appened in a battle to a batt'ry of the corps
Which is first among the women an' amazin' first in war."
—KIPLING.

I.

DRIVER JOSEPH SNATT, K3 Battery, R.H.A., slouched across the barrack-square on his way to the stables. Having just received a severe punishment for the heinous crime of ill-treating a horse, in spite of his plausible excuse that he had been bitten and had lost his temper, Snatty, as he was always called, felt much aggrieved.

"'Orses," he thought to himself, "is everything in this 'ere bloomin' batt'ry—men's nothing."

Nor, in his own particular case, was he far wrong. For the horses of K3 were certainly quite wonderful, and Snatty was undoubtedly a 'waster.' His death or his desertion would have been a small matter compared with the spoiling of one equine temper.

The officers disliked him because he was an eyesore to them; the N.C.O.'s hated him because he gave them endless trouble; and the men had shown their distrust of his personal cleanliness by ducking him in a horse-trough more than once. Driver Snatt felt that every man's hand was against him, and since he possessed neither the will-power nor the desire to overcome his delinquencies by a little honest toil, he not infrequently

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drowned his sorrows in large potations of canteen beer. In person he was small and rather shrivelled-looking—old for his age unquestionably. A nervous manner and a slight stammer in the presence of his superiors, combined with a shifty eye at all times, served to enhance the unpleasing effect which he produced on all who knew him. There was but one thing to be said for him—he could ride. Before enlisting he had been in a training stable, but had been dismissed for drink or worse. On foot he lounged about with rounded shoulders and uneven steps, always untidy and often dirty. But once upon a horse, the puny, awkward figure that was the despair of N.C.O.'s and officers alike, became graceful, supple, almost beautiful. The firm easy seat that swayed to every motion, the hands that coaxed even the hard-mouthed gun-horses into going kindly, betrayed the horseman born. Snatty might kick his horses in the stomach ; he would never jerk them in the mouth.

At the conclusion of the mid-day stable-hour Snatt was summoned before his section officer, one Briddlington by name, more frequently known as 'Biddie,' and thus addressed—

"Now, look here : you've made a dam' poor show so far, and this is your last chance. If you don't take it, God help you, for I won't. See ? "

Snatt stared at his boot, swallowed twice, and then fixed his gaze on some distant point above the opposite stable.

"Ye-es, sir," he said huskily.

"Very well. Now you've never had a job of your own, and I'm going to try you with one. You'll take over the wheel of A sub-section gun team to-day, and have those two remounts to drive. I shall give you a fortnight's

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trial. If I see you're trying, I'll do all I can for you. Otherwise—out you go. Understand that ? ”

Again the deep interest in the distant point, but this time there was a trace of surprise in the faintly uttered “ Yes, sir.”

Snatty saluted and retired, wondering greatly. The wheel-driver of a gun team is an important personage : he occupies a coveted position attained only by those who combine skill, nerve and horsemanship with the ability to tend a pair of horses as they would their own children, and to clean a double set of harness better than their fellows. Snatty at first was resentful : “ 'E's put me there to make a fool of me, I s'pose. All right, I'll show 'im up. I can drive as well as any of them.” Then he experienced a feeling of pleasurable anticipation. As it so happened he detested the driver whose place he was to take, and he looked forward with satisfaction to witnessing the fury of that worthy when ordered to ‘ hand over ’ to the despised waster of the battery. He was not grateful—that was not his nature—nor was he proud of having been selected. He was on the defensive, determined to show that given a definite position with duties and responsibilities of his own, he could do very well—if he chose. Which was precisely the frame of mind into which his thoughtful subaltern had hoped to lure him.

In the barrack-room Snatty met with much abuse. In a battery which prides itself enormously on its horses, any ill-treatment of them is not left unnoticed. Barrack-room invective does not take the form of delicate sarcasm : on the contrary, it is coarse and directly to the point. The culprit sat upon his bed-cot and sulked in silence, until a carrot-headed driver sitting on the table with his hat on the back of his head remarked—

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"I see ole Biddie givin' you a proper chokin' off after stables."

The chance for which Snatty had waited very patiently had come, and he retorted quickly—

"Oh! did yer? Well, p'raps you'll be glad to 'ear that 'e 'as given me your 'osses and the wheel of A sub., says you're no — use, 'e does!"

Howls of derision greeted this sally, and Snatty relapsed into silence. But that evening he whistled softly to himself as he led his new horses out to water and watched his red-headed enemy, deprived of his legitimate occupation, put to the unpleasant task of 'mucking out' the stable. The day, so Snatty felt, had not been wasted.

II.

From that time dated the conversion of Driver Joseph Snatt. The change was necessarily gradual, for no man can reform in a week: the habits inculcated by years of idleness cannot be cast aside in a moment, nor can the doubts and suspicions clinging to an untrustworthy character be dispersed by one day's genuine work. But still a change for the better was evident. The comments of the barrack-room were free but not unfriendly, for Snatty was beginning to find his true level after his own peculiar fashion. Briddlington, too, did not fail to notice the success of his experiment. Whilst inclined to boast of it in a laughing way to his brother officers, he had the good sense to overlook many trivial offences and to make much of anything that he could find to praise. What pleased him most of all was Snatty's behaviour to his horses. Dirty he still was upon occasions, and scarcely as smart as most drivers of the battery; nor was he always quite devoid of drink, but to his horses from that

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first day onwards he became a devoted faithful slave. They were a pair of which any man might well have been proud. Both were bright bays, well matched in colour and in size. In shape they were almost the ideal stamp of artillery wheeler, which is tantamount to saying that they might have graced the stud of any hunting gentleman of fifteen stone or thereabouts. Snatty's pride in them was almost ludicrous. A word said against them would put him up in arms at once, and when Territorials borrowed the battery horses for their training on Saturday afternoons his indignation knew no bounds.

"'Ow can I keep me 'orses fit," he used to say, "if a bloomin' bank clerk goes drivin' 'em at a stretched gallop the 'ole o' Saturday? Proper dis'eartenin', that's wot it is." And this in spite of the fact that he was allowed a shilling for his trouble. The villainies that he perpetrated for their wellbeing, if discovered, would have given him small chance before a stern commanding officer. He stole oats from the forage barn, bread and sugar from his barrack-room and even the feeds from the next manger. Snatty's moral sense, as we have seen, was not a very high one. But pricked ears and gentle whinnies as he approached, and velvety muzzles pushed into his roughened hand, betrayed the effect of many a purloined dainty, and amply compensated for any qualms which a guilty but belated conscience may have given him. Not that he was particularly caressing in his manner. He would growl at each one as he groomed him, or scold him as one does a naughty child, and his "Naow *then*, stand still, will yer, Dawn," was well known during stable hour. Who it was who had first called the off horse Dawn was never quite clear, but Snatty in a fit of poetic inspiration had christened the other Daylight. Dawn was difficult to shoe, so difficult indeed that his driver's presence

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was required in the forge to keep him still. And when Snatty went on furlough for a month both horses began to lose condition.

The years went by and Snatty soldiered on, winter and summer, drill season and leave season, content to drive the wheel of A and drink a bit too much on Saturdays. But in that time he had become a man—not a strong determined man, certainly not a refined one, but for all that a man. To Briddlington, who had raised him from the mental slough in which he had lain to all appearances content, he at no time betrayed a sense of gratitude. On the contrary, the position of a privileged person of some standing which he had gained he attributed largely to his own cunning in deceiving his superiors combined with his consummate skill with horses. But still he had learnt his job, and was fulfilling his destiny to more purpose than many better men. Moreover he was happy. Crooning softly as he polished straps and buckles in the harness-room, with a skill and speed born of long practice, he was contented, and was vaguely conscious that the world was not a bad place after all. An officer who knew him well once said—

“I wouldn't trust him to carry a bottle of whisky half a mile, but I'd send him across England with a pair of horses—by himself. And as to driving—well, I don't know about the needle and the camel's eye, but I know that Snatty would drive blind drunk along the narrow road to Heaven and never let his axles touch!” For two years in succession the battery won the galloping competition at Olympia, with Snatty in the wheel. And over rough ground, moving fast, he was unequalled.

When his time was up and Snatty had to go, there was never, perhaps, a time-expired man who was so hard put to it to assume a joy at leaving which he did not feel. Of

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course, like other men, he swaggered about saying that he was glad to be 'shut of' the army; that he had got a nice little place to step into where there was not any "Do this" and "Do that" and "Why the deuce haven't you done what I told you?" But in his heart he was more affected than he had ever been before.

"Wot about yer 'orses, Snatty?" someone asked him; "who's going to 'ave them when you're gorn?"

"'Ow should I know?" he answered, rather nettled.

"Nobbler Parsons, so I 'eard. 'E'll soon spoil 'em, I bet yer."

Then was Snatty very wroth, and he replied—

"You leave me and my 'orses alone, or you'll be in for it, I warn yer," thereby revealing his inmost feelings most effectually.

On the eve of his departure he was treated by his friends till he grew almost maudlin. Then he slipped away "just to say good-bye to 'em," and even that hardened assembly of 'canteen regulars' forbore to scoff. He was found when the battery came down to evening stables, a pathetic figure, in his ill-fitting suit of plain clothes, standing between his beloved pair, an arm round the neck of one, his pockets full of sugar and tears of drink and genuine grief trickling down his unwashed cheeks.

"Six bloomin' years I've 'ad yer," they heard him say. "Six bloomin' years, and no one's ever said a word against yer that I 'aven't knocked the 'ead off. P'rades and manœuvres, practice camp and ceremonial, there's nothin' I can't do wiv yer and . . . and, Gawd, I wish I wasn't leavin' yer now to some other bloke." Then they led him gently away, and on the morrow he was gone. For a week he was missed; in a month he was forgotten. Only

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Daylight and Dawn still fretted for him and turned round in their stalls with anxious wistful eyes.

For six months Snatty struggled to keep body and soul together, living upon his reserve pay and upon such small sums as he could pick up by doing odd jobs in livery stables. But the self-respect which he had won so hardly slipped away from him and he sank slowly in the social scale. The lot of the ex-soldier whose character is 'fair,' and whose record of sobriety leaves much to be desired, is not a happy one. Snatty was in rags and wellnigh starving. Small wonder, then, that one day the blandishments of an eloquent recruiting sergeant proved too much for his resistance, and that he succumbed to the temptations thrust upon him by the great god Hunger. Manfully he perjured himself when brought before the magistrate. His name was Henry Morgan, his age twenty-three years and five months, and he had never served before, so help him God. All false—but Snatty wished to live.

He asked to be put into the infantry, fearing that his knowledge of the ways of troop stables would betray him if he joined a mounted branch. The penalties attached to a 'false answer on attestation' were heavy, as he knew, and he would take no chances. In due course, therefore, he found himself posted to a crack light infantry regiment, and his troubles soon began. To be marched about a barrack-square followed by shouts of objurgation was bad enough: to be pestered with the intricacies of musketry was worse: but what galled him most of all was to have to walk. He loathed the life. This was not the world of soldiering that he had known and loved. His soul hungered for the rattle of log-chains and the jingle of harness; the smell of the stable still lingered in his nostrils. Moreover, he was in constant trouble, for desperation made him reckless. Those who had known him in the battery

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would scarcely have recognised in the sullen ne'er-do-well, whom men called Morgan, the cheerful Snatty of a former time. He had just passed his recruit drills (with difficulty be it said) and taken his place in the ranks, when the war which wise men had predicted as inevitable was forced upon the nation with disconcerting suddenness. The regiment was ordered out on service, and with it, amongst nine hundred other souls, went Private Henry Morgan, *alias* Snatty.

III.

A hot sun beating down from a cloudless sky upon a land parched and dusty from a lengthened drought ; miles upon miles of rolling downs, which once were green but which the driest summer for many years has baked into a dirty yellow ; here and there an oasis consisting of a copse of fir-trees, a farmstead and a field or two of pasture marking the presence of a kindly stream : a landscape in short so typical of hundreds of square miles of this particular region that ordinarily it would fail to interest. But to-day the peace of the countryside is disturbed by the boom of guns and the rattle of musketry. Two mighty armies are at grips at last, and in the space between them hovers Death.

Upon a little rise commanding a good view of the surrounding country there is a long line of khaki figures lying prone behind a scanty earthwork. These are infantry, and shaken infantry at that ; shaken because they have marched all night and stormed that hill at dawn with fearful loss, because they are weak from hunger and parched with thirst, and because they feel in their hearts that the end is near. Relief must come, or one determined rush will drive them back to ruin. Shells burst over them with whip-like crack, rifle-fire tears through their ranks

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and sometimes a harsh scream followed by a deafening report and clouds of acrid smoke marks the advent of a high-explosive shell.

A much harassed brigadier sat behind a rock near the telephone awaiting the answer to his urgent demand for guns. It came sooner than he expected it, and took the tangible shape of a little group of horsemen which appeared on the hill some way to his right. There was a quick consultation as glasses swept the front. Then the horses were led away under cover and the range-takers began operations. The brigadier recognised the signs and gained fresh hope as he saw that his prayer was answered. At the far end of the line Private Morgan, busily engaged in excavating a hole for himself by means of an entrenching tool much resembling a short-handled garden hoe, looked up quickly as he heard a well-known voice say—

“All right, Biddie, I’ll observe from here. Bring ’em in quick.”

“Strewth!” muttered Snatty to himself, “it’s the major. So the old troop’s comin’ into action ’ere.”

For weeks he had scanned every battery that had been near him, hoping to meet his own. But Horse Artillery act with cavalry and work far ahead of the toiling infantry in rear, so that it was not till now, when a pitched battle was in progress, when the advanced cavalry had come in and every available gun was being utilised, that Fate permitted Snatty to see his old battery once more. Looking over his shoulder he said—

“It’s all right now, sergeant. There’s some guns coming.”

“You shut yer mouth and get on with yer work,” was the rejoinder. “Wot do you know about guns, I’d like to know?”

“Oh, nothink! But you watch ’em, that’s all,” said

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Private Morgan with an ill-suppressed gleam of pride, which made the sergeant wonder.

The line of six guns, each with its wagon behind it, thundered up the rise. There was a shrill whistle, and a hand held up. Then the hoarse voices of the sergeants shouted "Action front," and the wheelers were thrown into the breeching, almost sitting on their haunches to stop the weight behind them: the gunners leapt from their horses and sprang to the gun: a second's pause, then "Drive on," and six limbers went rattling away to the rear as six trails were flung round half a circle and dropped with a thud. Hardly were they down before each gun had its wagon up beside it and the horses unhooked. They too galloped to the rear. In ten seconds there was not a sign of movement. The battery was there, and that was all.

Of the weary infantry who lay and watched there was one at least who could appreciate the merit of the performance.

"Couldn't ha' been better in the old days on Salisbury Plain," was his comment. "But, Gawd! the 'orses 'ave fell away proper. Skeletons, that's wot they are now."

But Private Morgan's soliloquy was again cut short by the remorseless sergeant behind him.

A few curt orders passed rapidly down the battery, then came two sharp reports, followed by the click of the reopened breech, as the ranging rounds went singing on their journey. A spurt of brown earth showed for a second in front of that thick black line a mile or more away, another showed behind.

"Graze short—graze over," said the major, still staring through his glasses. "Eighteen hundred, one round gun fire."

The order was repeated by a man standing behind him

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with a megaphone, and followed almost instantaneously by a round from every gun. Some puffs of smoke above the target, the echo of the bursting shell borne back along the breeze, and then for perhaps a minute all Hell might have been let loose, such was the uproar as every gun was worked at lightning speed. A whistle—and in a moment all was still again.

"Target down—stop firing," was the laconic order. "But," added the major softly, "I think that sickened 'em a bit."

The attacking infantry had dropped down under cover, but not for long. Nearer and nearer pressed the relentless lines, sometimes pausing a while, or even dropping back, but always, like the waves of the incoming tide, gaining fresh ground at every rush. The end was very near now, and the bitterness of defeat entered into the defenders' hearts. For they did not know that the struggle for this particular hill, though of vital importance to themselves, was merely serving the subsidiary purpose of diverting attention while greater issues matured elsewhere. They only knew that ammunition was scarce, that they wanted water and that now at last the order to retire had come. They got away in dribblets, slowly, very slowly, until at last nothing was left upon the hillside but a handful of infantry, the battery and the dead and wounded. The riflemen crawled closer to the guns, feeling somehow that there was solace in their steady booming. The major looked at his watch, and then at the attacking lines in front of him.

"In ten minutes we'll have to get out of this," he said, "bring the horses up close behind us under-cover." The minutes passed and the net around them drew closer.

"Prepare to retire—rear limber up."

The few remaining infantry emptied their magazines

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and crept off down the hill. The guns fired their last few rounds as the teams came jingling up. Their arrival was the signal for a fresh outburst of fire. The few moments required for limbering up seemed a lifetime as men fell fast and horses mad with terror broke loose and dashed away. But years of stern discipline and careful training stood the battery in good stead now. The principle of "Abandon be damned: we never abandon guns" was not forgotten. Through the shouting, the curses and the dust, the work went on. Dead horses were cut free and pulled aside, gunners took the place of fallen drivers, and at last five guns were got away. The sixth was in great difficulties. The maddened horses backed in every direction but the right one, and the panting gunners strove in vain to drop the trail upon the limber-hook. Beside the team stood Briddlington, trying to soothe the horses and steadying the men in the calm, cool voice that he habitually used upon parade.

Then suddenly from behind a rock there crawled out a strange figure. Filthy beyond words, hatless, with an inch of scrubby beard and one foot bound up in blood-stained rags, this apparition limped painfully towards the gun—

"Naow then!" a husky voice exclaimed, "stand still, will yer, Dawn."

"By Jove! it's Snatty," cried Briddlington, and as he spoke the driver of Snatty's horses gave a little grunt and pitched off on to the ground. Without a word the erst-while private of infantry stooped and took the whip from the dead man's hand. He patted each horse in turn, then climbed into the saddle.

"Steady now—get back, will yer," he growled, and they obeyed him quietly enough. The men behind gave a heave at the gun and a click denoted that the trail was on its hook.

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"Drive on," cried Snatty, flourishing his whip, and down the hill they went full gallop.

Safety lay not in the way that they had come, but farther to their left, where the ground was bad. At the bottom of the hill there was a low bank with a ditch in front of it, and just before they reached it the centre driver received a bullet in the head and dropped down like a stone. There was no time to pull up. The lead driver took his horses hard by the head and put them at the bank. They jumped all right, but the pair behind them, deprived of a guiding hand upon the reins, saw the ditch at the last moment and swerved.

"My Gawd!" said Snatty, sitting back for the crash he knew would follow. The traces and the pace had dragged the centre horses over in spite of their swerve, but one of them stumbled as he landed. He staggered forward and, before he could recover, Snatty's horses and the gun were upon him in a whirling mass of legs and straps and wheels. Briddlington, who had been riding beside the team, leapt to the ground and ran to the fallen horses.

"Sit on their heads," he cried. "Undo the quick release your side. Now then, together—heave." There was a rattle of hoofs against the footboard as Daylight rolled over kicking wildly to get free. Briddlington, at the risk of his life, leant over and pulled frantically at a strap. The two ends flew apart and the snorting horses struggled to their feet, but Snatty lay very still and deathly white upon the ground.

"Don't stand gaping. Hook in again—quick. We're not clear away yet by a long chalk," said Briddlington. Then he bent down and, putting his arms round Snatty's crumpled figure, lifted him very tenderly aside. "Lie still now," he said with a catch in his voice as he saw that the case was hopeless, "and you'll be all right." But those

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flashing hoofs and steel-tyred wheels had done their work. Snatty's last drive was over.

"It warn't their fault. I should 'ave 'eld them up," was all he said before he died.

The gun rejoined the battery safely, and defeat was turned to victory ere nightfall, but Private Henry Morgan was returned as 'missing' from his regiment.

IV.

To this day, on the anniversary of the battle, in the mess of K3 Battery, R.H.A., it is the custom, when the King's health has been drunk, for the President to say—

"Mr Vice, to the memory of the man who brought away the last gun." And the Vice-president answers: "Gentlemen, to Driver Snatt."

Then the curious visitor is shown a large oil painting of a pair of bright bay horses with a little wizened driver riding one of them.

"That's Snatty," they will say, "a drunken scoundrel if you like, but he loved those horses, and he used to drive like blazes."

XIII.

SUBADAR SHER ALI KHAN.

TWENTY years or more ago I was in charge of a big reserve centre situated in a cantonment in the north of India whilst the reservists were up for training. Primarily it was the centre for three Sikh and three Dogra regiments, but, in addition to these, nearly twelve hundred men of other regiments, recruited from districts more or less adjacent to the cantonment, were attached to the centre for administrative and training purposes. These last were chiefly Punjabi Mahomedans, with a large admixture of Euzufzai Pathans. Under the system then in force the training staff for this large body of men had to be found by the regiment stationed at the centre, which at the time happened to be a class regiment of Sikhs; but since, during the previous year's training, there had been a good deal of serious trouble between the Sikh training staff and the Pathan reservists, the G.O.C. had detailed another regiment in the brigade to furnish a party of Pathan N.O.'s and N.C.O.'s, who were attached for duty during the month the reserves were up for training.

In command of the party was an old Euzufzai Pathan—Subadar Sher Ali Khan—a splendid specimen of the best type of native officer. The old man had put in close on forty years of good work since he had first joined his regiment as a young recruit of between seventeen and

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eighteen years of age, and had seen active service against almost every tribe on the North-West Frontier of India. Of a Jewish type of face, with a prominent hooked nose, a somewhat scanty beard dyed red, and with piercing slate-blue eyes, in body he was tall and very spare. So spare indeed, he looked little more than skin and bone, but he was incredibly tough and wiry, and could walk all day without turning a hair, whilst on a hillside it took a good man to keep near him. He came of good stock and was a warm man in his own country, more than one village owning his sway.

Thoroughly independent and self-reliant, he was quite willing to take responsibility, as he proved on one occasion when he had a difference of opinion with a young political officer. The Subadar was in command of a small fort at the mouth of a valley which led up into independent tribal country. One day a jirgah, bristling with jezails, pistols, knives, &c., arrived at the fort gate to interview the political officer. Now it was a standing military order on the frontier that, with the exception of the garrison, no man bearing arms was permitted to enter any post, and that all lethal weapons must be deposited with the quarter-guard, where the owners were at liberty to resume them on departure. In accordance with these orders the sentry on duty at the fort gate stopped the jirgah. They protested, and the political officer (that he was very young and puffed up with a sense of his own importance is the only excuse which can be offered for what occurred), hearing the altercation, sent out to know what was the matter. On hearing that the jirgah had been prevented from entering, he dashed out and ordered the sentry to admit them at once. The sentry quoted his orders, and referred the officer to the Havildar in command of the quarter-guard. He, like a wise man, declined

to discuss the matter, and sent for Subadar Sher Ali Khan. The young officer, who had by this time unluckily lost his temper completely, turned on the Subadar and again imperiously ordered the immediate admission of the jirgah. The old man regretted that, as he was responsible for the safety of the fort, he was unable to comply unless the jirgah first deposited their arms in accordance with standing orders—from which decision nothing would move him. The jirgah was not admitted, and the political officer, boiling with rage, wrote to the commissioner of the district to report the Subadar for disobedience of orders. Sher Ali Khan, however, was no fool—he also wrote in his version, and reported the case for the information of his commanding officer; the net result being that the young political was sent on special urgent duty to Lahore, and was subsequently transferred to another sphere of usefulness.

One thing the old man had no use for was a horse—at all events for riding purposes—thoroughly agreeing with David Harum's opinion that, if he had to make his choice between riding and being kicked, he would say, "Kick away; it amounts to about the same thing as far as comfort goes, and it's a durn'd sight safer." It so happened that when his regiment was at Parachinar, in the Kurram valley, some of the officers went out one day to shoot *chikhor*, and the Subadar, who was a bit of a sportsman, wished to accompany them. The valley in which the party proposed to shoot was about five miles away from the frontier post, and one of the officers offered Sher Ali Khan the loan of a pony. The offer was firmly declined, the old man remarking gravely that he had served the Sirkar for over thirty years, and had earned his pension, so he was not going to risk the loss of it by getting outside a horse. He tramped out to the valley, and did his full share of

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walking and scrambling over the rocky hills that *chikhor* love, being most useful in keeping the beaters—mostly wild Pathan villagers—well in hand, and came back in the evening as fresh as paint, though most of the rest of the party had had quite enough.

He certainly had his somewhat unruly command of Pathans in wonderful order, though his methods would perhaps be considered drastic in the present day. Only on one occasion did I go near his company, which was at the time broken up into squads for preliminary drills, and I saw enough to convince me that only two courses were open to me—viz., putting him under arrest, or complete non-interference. As I stood there talking to the old man on some point of drill, he saw that one of the men was paying no attention to his instructor. He rushed up to him, and, after pouring forth a flood of what I took to be abuse (for I knew no Pushtu), seized the man by the nose and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat. A little while later something else went wrong, and, springing on the man who was at fault, he gave him a box on the ear which would have pretty well knocked him down had not an equally severe cuff on the other side of the head put him straight again. The remainder of the men were struggling hard to keep serious faces, for apparently the old gentleman had, in addition to a heavy hand, a pretty wit, and not even the victims resented his summary discipline, though, had I laid a finger on any one of them, I might likely have got a knife or a bayonet into me. After the above incidents, I thought it best to find occupation at other parts of the parade-ground. Whatever may have been one's opinion of his methods, they had the great merit of success, for in about a week his company were drilling with a smartness and precision they had been strangers to since the days when, in the first squad of recruits,

they had received their final polish from the Adjutant before being passed into the ranks. At the same time, in spite of their success, I do not recommend his methods for imitation, but merely chronicle them as one of the old gentleman's little peculiarities.

If, however, his ways on parade were summary, his discipline in the lines was no less drastic. Always before orderly-room he used to hold a small Durbar of his own, and inquire into any little peccadilloes which had been committed by his men. He would hear everything that was to be said on either side, and if he did not consider the case a serious one, would deal with it himself, as often as not slipping off his shoe and beating the culprit across the mouth or over the head with it. If he thought the case was a serious one he would reserve it for the C.O., and nothing annoyed him more than the man's being let off, or receiving a light award. One day he brought three or four men before me in this manner, to the best of my recollection for some not very serious acts of insubordination. Now there was always a difficulty at that time in dealing with reservists, for, as the men were up for so short a period, one was loth to put them in cells because of the loss of time, whilst long periods of confinement to the lines seemed a scarcely suitable punishment, more especially towards the end of the training, as a man would be going back to his home before his punishment was completed. On this particular occasion, there being barely ten days of the training left to run, I gave the men the rough edge of my tongue for five minutes or so, and, after warning them if they were brought up again I would try them by summary court-martial, let them go. Sher Ali Khan remained behind when everyone else had departed, and then, with the utmost respect, proceeded to tell me off, explaining to me that, no doubt, I was accus-

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tomed to dealing with Sikhs, but that the Pathan required sterner discipline. He then gave me to understand, still in the most respectful way, that when he brought anyone before me, it was because the man deserved punishment, and that he was quite capable of dealing with minor or trivial offences himself. The whole thing was done very firmly, but at the same time so respectfully and politely that it was quite impossible to resent the old man's remarks, though he made me feel rather as if I were a schoolboy prefect again, and being reproved by my house-master for some want of tact or error of judgment.

I was quite sorry to say good-bye to the old man at the end of the training, and the more so as his regiment was shortly afterwards moved to another station, so that I never came across him again. I heard, however, that he took his well-earned pension a year or two later, and hope sincerely he may still be in enjoyment of it. A better native officer I have never had under my command.

XIV.

THE BRINDIAN.

I.

COLONEL BURROUGHS was worried over a confidential report. He had made two such reports on the same officer during the previous two years, and now felt he had painted his lily a little too white, and should have included mention of spots. After all, most lilies have spots, but this one, being of rather the half-hardy kind, wanted tender treatment. Touches of frost in its confidential reports might have made it wilt.

Be it known that theoretically a confidential report says exactly what sort of officer an officer is. All reports must be communicated to the officers whom they concern.

Now there are some commanding officers, and they are the majority, who have not the smallest hesitation in telling an officer that they think unfavourably of him, but who have a very strong objection to sharing this confidence with higher authority. The result is a favourable confidential report.

There are other men, however, and they are in a weak minority, who are ready enough to report unfavourably to authority, but who do not at all like mentioning that fact to the officer reported on.

The result is again often a favourable report, or at least one with nothing unfavourable in it. Most confidential

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reports, therefore, are strongly laudatory or less strongly laudatory. Authority, who probably in its time has had to write these reports, makes the best of them it can, and does so by reading between the lines.

Colonel Burroughs was in a quandary. He was reporting on an Indian holding one of the recently granted King's commissions. As a commanding officer he had been apprised in a general and non-committal sort of way that such officers were to be looked on with not too strict an eye, and he himself, being a just man and a kindly, would have done so in any case. But being rather an over-conscientious man and determined not to be in any way prejudiced against a great innovation, he again strained a point, and for the third time sent in an entirely favourable report.

The King's commissioned Indian officer in question was in some ways a perfect model of professional knowledge. He outdistanced all his young polo-playing, race-riding, leave-taking white compeers in his knowledge of the Field Service Regulations, and his ability to answer questions concerning his military duties. In addition he was quite a good fellow, popular enough and well mannered.

The trouble was that he was totally unfitted to be an officer.

We will take him and his trouble *ab ovo*, go back twenty-two years, and view both him and it in their ovate and subsequent stages.

II.

In a nearly purely Sikh village, where every household possessed at least one male who had served, was still serving, or intended to serve in the Indian army, was one exception—to wit, the household of a Sahucar or, as we

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anglicise it, Sowkar. A Sowkar is, generally speaking, a banker and money-lender. He deals in finance in the widest sense of that word. As Sowkars went, he was decent enough, demanding no more than an honest 12 per cent per mensem with good security. He was necessary to the village, because though most of the men were soldiers, they were all small farmers, and small farmers must always be borrowing. To a greater or less extent everyone in the village was involved with the Sowkar. Seasons, good or bad, ruled the matter. Socially he was received with civility and the benevolent tolerance that debtors find it expedient to display towards their creditors.

Thus he was on visiting, though not very intimate, terms with old Rissaldar-major Hazara Singh, who bossed the village, owned more land, more decorations, a longer beard to his chin and more hair to his head than anyone else in that hairy community of soldier-yeomen. Moreover, the Rissaldar-major observed the Sikh faith in all its stern purity. He was admired for this, though not strictly imitated. Thus he abjured the offices of intrusive Brahmans at births, deaths and marriages, and maintained a private chaplain or Guru, who continuously read the Sikh scriptures and officiated on all the above-mentioned occasions.

The Sowkar was blessed with one son named Tangri, and cursed with several daughters and a shrill wife. The daughters, however, at this point fade from the picture, and the wife forms only a shrewish part of the background. It is the son with whom I deal chiefly. He has already been introduced as the subject of a confidential report in Chapter I.

The lad grew up, played with and went to school with his little Sikh co-villagers. Their attitude to him was a boyish version of their elders' attitude to his father.

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For he was not as they were, sons of heroes and one day to be heroes themselves. This fact they made very plain to him very often.

His father married him off rather well at the age of fourteen. He went to a university, took a degree, discarded religion, and, putting childish things quite away, took his seat on an office stool in, or more strictly speaking on, the beaten mud floor of his father's bank. He became a father himself during the year in which the Great War ended, while grandfather, as a reward for public benevolences performed during the war, became a Rai Sahib.

III.

Shortly after these events it was announced that King's commissions would be granted to a limited number of Indians of the right social status and merit. Hitherto Indian officers had only received commissions signed by the Viceroy. They served under British officers, and their different grades possessed a nomenclature of their own. Henceforward the few selected as worthy of commissions signed by the King-Emperor would pass through the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, and enter the Indian Army on the same footing and with the same rank as young Britishers. As a start, certain Indian regiments were chosen as 'Indianised Regiments.' It was intended that Indians on passing out of Sandhurst should go only to these regiments, which would thus commence a process of becoming Indianised from the bottom upwards.

To prevent confusion I shall allude to these young Indian officers as Brindians, and to the old type of Indian officers as such.

The announcement was received in the village with mixed feelings. The younger men liked it naturally.

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The older ones, and particularly the serving soldiers, disliked it. The prospect of very young men of their own race being put in military authority over their heads was repellent to them, and an innovation.

Tangri liked it. As a young Sowkar, with little wealth and a long time to wait for more of it, he saw in a King's commission a short-cut to social promotion. It was this rather than the mere bubble reputation that he sought. The cannon's mouth was a distinct drawback, but this had to be faced, and he hoped for the best. He resolved to sound his father.

"You will doubtless have heard, oh my father," he began, "of what they are talking in our village—this matter of King's commissions."

"I have heard, my son."

"You will also have observed, oh my father, that though you are rich and own this three-storeyed house, higher by one storey than that of your friend the Ris-saldar-major, and though we are here much respected and well received, yet—doubtless you will have noticed this also—when a sahib comes to our village he will pay extreme respect to the soldiers, but that he takes no notice of us."

"It is the custom, my son. Regard it not. Consider rather that these be-medalled ones enjoy but the shadow—we the substance. Regard it not therefore, I say. Grow richer and fatter. In time the Sirkar itself will honour you to a much higher degree than can the visit of a stray sahib or two to our village. Now, touching this request by Jemadar Sohan Singh regarding my loan to him, kindly look up his record and let me have all details in an hour's time."

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IV.

The Sowkar thus turned the conversation, though he had divined why his son had initiated it.

He himself was nibbling at the idea, but, before showing his hand, thought that he would step across to "my friend the Rissaldar-major" and clear up one or two points. He proceeded to do so.

Several of the Rissaldar-major's descendants met him at their grandsire's courtyard gateway. One of them ran in shouting, "Grandfather, here's the bunnia (petty shopkeeper)! Shall we let him in?"

Grandfather was in his byre performing acts of midwifery on a recently delivered mother buffalo. He was in a complete state of *déshabille*. His twenty yards of head-dress had been laid aside, disclosing his hair tied in a knot in a little red cloth, or pug, on the top of his head. His beard, which usually climbed up his ears like a well-trained convolvulus to mingle with his hair on top, was to his knees. He welcomed his visitor with a certain offhand civility, and sent one of his brood scurrying for a chair.

The Sowkar opened on a wrong note. He congratulated the old soldier on the grant of these new commissions to the Indian Army.

"Thus," said he, "our country shall march forward to complete 'swaraj' or home rule. Our young men will rise to the position of sahibs, and honourable persons like yourself will no longer have beardless white boys thrust over them."

The Rissaldar-major's face registered a disapproving snort, though he did not actually emit one. He hated the word 'swaraj.' He never talked of 'our country.'

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If the words meant anything to him, they meant not India but that part of it which was inhabited by his co-religionists and spoke his own language. He held the strangest old-world ideas about sahibs and as to book-learning making an Indian as good as a white man.

He paused before making rejoinder, and, having cleared his mind for action, spake—

“As to beardless young sahibs, who should know them better than I? I’ve had scores of them, ay, scores and scores, learning at my knee. Yes, they learnt—all I had to teach, drill and the like; but they hadn’t to come to me to learn authority. These white men don’t learn that, they’re born with it—all of them. No one learns it. This new system of putting black men over white won’t work. Not yet, at any rate; not for a few hundred years; not till we come to be born with authority as they are.”

“Why, I always thought you were a progressive man,” said the Sowkar, “that you moved with the times.”

“So I do—so I do,” replied the old man. “Don’t you mistake my meaning. I’m the last to say that our young men, who are now well educated and talk English, will be content any longer with the command of a troop or half-company. They’ll want something better than that.”

“I’m glad to hear you say that,” said the Sowkar. “But what do you propose, then?”

“I’ve heard something of how they arrange that sort of thing in the Army in Mis’r (Egypt). We might manage things that way. But don’t go asking me for details. These new ideas bother me. I’ve always obeyed orders, and the sahib-log have always given them and been responsible. That’s what they are here for, and what

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they'll be here for when you are dead and your son and your grandchildren."

"They tell me," said the Sowkar, "that these new commissions, although, of course, chiefly meant for you soldiers and your sons, are also to be offered to civilians of sufficient wealth and social standing. Perhaps you can put me right as to this?"

"Naturally," replied the old soldier, "the commissions are to be offered to us. Possibly if there are a few over, civilians may get these—I can't say. You can find out all about that from my friend the Deputy Commissioner, or, in your case better perhaps, from one of his underlings."

"By your kindness," replied the Sowkar (who remarked under his breath, "The old cat!"), "Ijazat (have I leave to go)?"

"Ruksat (you have leave)," rejoined the Rissaldar-major. He might have used a slightly more courteous word, but 'Ruksat' kept the Sowkar to his place.

v.

To the Deputy Commissioner's office the Sowkar went next day, riding a miserable pony the twelve miles, at a solemn walk, revolving the pros and cons of the new idea as he went. On arrival, the passage of a small coin from his hand to that of a very humble hanger-on, and of a slightly larger coin to another rather less humble attendant, procured him admission to the presence of a junior clerk. The Sowkar had hoped to win through now without further shedding of largesse, but the junior clerk put him right as to this; and in due course he received the printed document setting forth the conditions under which King's commissions were to be offered. The Rissaldar-major would have boldly sought the presence of the Deputy

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Commissioner himself, and none would have denied him. The Sowkar was wealthy, but knew his place.

He was received unkindly by his wife on getting home again. Somehow the project had leaked out.

"You old dotard!" she screamed. "What ass's tricks have you been up to? Turning our Tangri into a soldier? Why, he might get hurt! How many in this village were maimed or killed in the war? I've no patience with you!"

"Oh," replied the startled Sowkar, "everyone says there'll be no more wars. The last one finished the lot."

"Then why have soldiers?" shrilled the dame, not inappositely.

"Well, you see, we must have soldiers to—to—defend us."

"Well, and won't that be war, fool?"

"No, no," returned her husband. "What I meant to say was that without soldiers there'd be no pay for a lot of the young men, or pensions for the old ones. That would be bad for business, you know—very, very bad."

His wife snorted at this, and the Sowkar made his escape.

As a matter of fact, he had forgotten in the glamour of the new idea that a soldier's trade is a rough one. He decided to have another talk with his military friend, and stepped across the gulli, or narrow village street, to do so.

He found the Rissaldar-major *en grande tenue* just back from a wedding. Except for his dandy little toe-tilted scarlet shoes, he was all in white; and it sparkled with the sparks that only an Indian matron can launder into these soft white garments. His Jodhpore breeches were so amazingly tight about his shins that it was a wonder how he got into, a greater wonder how he got out of, them. A cheap English-made umbrella completed this

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ceremonial get-up, and slightly marred it. He wore all his seven decorations on his breast, and an eighth round his neck.

"I suppose," said the Sowkar after greetings, "that the Sirkar gave you each of these decorations for a battle?"

"Not so," answered the Rissaldar-major loftily, but not a little pleased at the admiration bestowed on his laurels. "Each medal, to be accurate, represents several battles, or, as we have it, one campaign. Thus there are six campaigns and at least eighteen battles. The seventh decoration—this one that hangs on the right—is only given to persons of particular merit; while the one round my neck is—I don't wish to boast—awarded to persons of still greater merit."

"I admire them very, very greatly," said the Sowkar. "They are indeed a credit to our village; but I suppose no more will be awarded now."

"How so?" retorted the Rissaldar-major, firing up.

"Why, because they tell me that there will be no more wars," said the Sowkar.

"Well, well," replied the old optimist, "I think that's going a bit too far: we must hope for the best. No more wars, indeed!" He added as a more cheerful after-thought, "Why, the Sirkar always has some small matters on hand to be settled somewhere. That's where we'll come in. Yes, surely, there'll always be medals."

"Certainly, certainly," agreed the Sowkar. "But these little wars won't be bloody affairs like the last, will they? Plenty of the enemy killed, of course, but on our side, just here a one and there a one, eh?"

The Rissaldar-major was brought unwillingly to agree that this might be so, but added, "For a generation, and then who can tell?"

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This was good enough for the Sowkar. He resolved to stick to his idea, and to risk Tangri's skin in small wars for a generation.

VI.

Father and son went into matters the same night, no tempestuous petticoat being present.

"Mind you," said his father at the beginning of the discussion, "if we go forward in this matter and if you become an officer eventually, see to it that you're not too forward in battle. I believe there are fairly safe places rearward, where they arrange the supply of ammunition and food and so on. Be you therefore in such places rather than forward where danger is. Thus you will win izzat enough, and at the same time preserve a whole skin."

Tangri looked at his sire, and one eyelid quivered slightly. They belonged to the banking, not to one of the fighting classes.

Fell they then to discussing other matters. First, as to the branch of the service. Not much time was spent on this. It was cavalry every time. The cavalry was 'more class.' Then as to finance. There would be a certain amount of preliminary spadework, and this would run into money. Palm-oil is an expensive form of lubricant, and its application requires nice adjustment according to the palm. They were thus running through the various palms and apportioning to each its oil, when the old man made a sudden exclamation: "Oh, my son! my son! Not to know that! And after an expensive university education and all! Now take it from me once for all, that pukka sahibs can't be approached like that. If you tried that sort of thing on, you'd ruin your chances—absolutely ruin them!"

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Young Tangri breathed freer, for he had been worrying as they worked their way upwards as to what the Deputy Commissioner would cost them, and had priced him rather high.

Then, of course, there was the question of chits—chits from influential persons, almost total strangers, who would be asked to testify to intimate knowledge of the recipient's social standing, general worth and suitability.

Methodically they arranged their scheme, and started on it next day.

VII.

Some eighteen months later I received a letter from my old friend the Rissaldar-major. He wrote little enough in his own language, and not at all in English. His letter had been written for him by a babu. In it he hoped I was quite 'hale and hearty,' asked me to give his salaams to a great many of his old officers throughout the British Isles, and briefly narrated the merits and fortunes of his own numerous sons and grandsons. After which he came to the point.

"There is in this my village a respectable Sowkar whose one son is at Royal Military, England. He is desirous of obtaining news of said child's welfare. Kindly will your Honour see him and write news of him. Sowkar is most respectable person. There have been two bad harvests owing to too little rain." There followed son's name (Tangri) and a London address.

I judged the last sentence to be not quite so inconsequent as might appear. For consider. Two bad harvests had caused the Rissaldar-major to resort to the Sowkar for a loan, and he had received the loan probably on favourable terms on condition that he would write to an English friend and procure news of the lender's son.

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I was anxious to oblige an old friend, and the Royal Military College not being then in session, I wrote to the address given me, No. 345 Beulah Avenue, London, N.E. 3, asking the young man to meet me in London. My club was the only convenient place for the interview, but certain London clubs are a little difficult as to admission of strangers whose appearance deviates from the normal. I, however, overcame this obstacle without much trouble, and decided to receive him of Beulah in a sort of Norman's-land alcove half-way up the stairs.

It was a dirty raw winter afternoon when I received young Tangri at the door of my club and convoyed him to the alcove. A tigerishly striped ulster, a cloth cap and the general beastliness of the day conspired to make the worst of my visitor's appearance. But when he had shed the two former, he altered greatly for the better, and proved to be a well set-up, nice-looking youth. He spoke English almost perfectly, and was shy without being awkward.

I elicited some rather negative information about his work and play and the company he kept at Sandhurst. He was not unduly optimistic as to his chances of passing out, and confided to me that he would have to be pushed rather than passed out. He mentioned naïvely that he and the other Indian cadets had agreed not to accept commissions into any of the Indianised regiments. He asked me to represent to his father that England was an expensive place, and especially as regards outfits for young military officers. Recollecting certain difficulties with my own parent on the same matter, I said I would do what I could. Coming down to brass tacks at last, he asked for two chits: one to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff in England, and the other to the Commander-in-Chief in India. In these I was to state

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that he and his were from the top shelf of Things in General, that he himself was a most meritorious young man, as such to be appointed to a good non-Indianised regiment.

I told him that we were in quite the wrong quarter of the globe for chits, and that they were never used in England. He did not in the least believe me, but was quite nice about it.

I asked him how he fared during the Sandhurst vacations. He said that Beulah was a very nice place, that Mrs Hopkins, his landlady, was very kind to him, and so was Kitty. I asked him who Kitty was. He replied, "Oh, her little girl—she's ever so free and easy. Quite a good sort, you know. I dance and play tennis with her quite a lot." From this I apprehended that Kitty was quite a big little girl. I even felt some qualms on Kitty's behalf. She probably thought she was dancing and playing tennis and being ever so free and easy with a young Indian prince, and an unmarried one at that.

I asked Tangri whether he had had any trouble about the diet restrictions of his caste. He stated that he had dropped 'all that nonsense' on leaving India, and intended never to resume it, except when back in his village.

There was a wistful look in his eye when we parted. He was still hankering after a chit. I was able to write a good report of him to the Rissaldar-major, and in my letter I named a round sum for expenses and outfit that probably made old dad wince.

A few months later I descried Tangri's name towards the tip of the tail of the Sandhurst passing-out list, and a little later he appeared in the 'Gazette' as a commissioned officer.

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VIII.

We have now traced the subject of a confidential report *ab ovo* and through the chicken period. Behold him now as a fully commissioned cockerel, wearing upon each shoulder one star, lord of a little pullet and father of a chick.

He had been out of India for rather over two years, and returned to his home for a month's leave before joining his regiment.

During his time in England he had been in fairly close though perhaps not very intimate contact with the young embryo British officer, and in quite intimate relation with Miss Catherine Hopkins and other inhabitants of Beulah Avenue, London, N.E. He returned to India, therefore, with rather mixed impressions of British society and a thin English veneer. Of this a month in his native surroundings served to rub off the greater part. Age-long habits and points of view reasserted themselves.

He had gone to England rather intrigued as to what, if any, was the difference between an Indian and an Englishman. He returned, the discoverer not of the difference but of many rather puzzling differences. One of these was the attitude of the young Englishmen he had met towards the truth. It and his own were poles apart. In theirs he recognised a code, but considered it often suicidal and always foolish. They would lie officially with gusto to save another or to preserve a tradition, and without caring much whether they were believed or not or found out or not. His own code he considered a better one. He did not know he possessed one, a very roomy one, with only one law to it—*i.e.*, that it was not a vice to lie, but that it was a sin to be found out.

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Then these young Britishers exhibited a singular lack of indirectness. If they wanted a thing they asked for it or went bald-headed for it. There was no brain-work, no subtleties, no chicanery or intrigue about their methods of procedure. In this he frankly despised them. They were no better than buffaloes, and lacked some of life's most excellent savours in consequence.

An Oriental is seldom flippant or waggish. Rather does he cultivate a weightiness and a dignity both in his manner and personal appearance. Now these Englishmen were never solemn, and there was no end to their buffooneries. To dignity they never gave a thought, save to gibe at it if they ever saw the smallest trace of it in another. And yet Tangri noticed on the most unexpected occasions veins of seriousness, which intrigued imagination while they teased him out of thought.

Their attitude towards women was, of course, very different from his own ; and he found them a very great deal younger for their ages than he was for his.

He believed they possessed a religion, but they maintained a reserve amounting to secrecy about it. He suspected that there was a code here also, but failed to trace it. He himself, as an advanced Indian, had dropped all religious beliefs about the time he had taken his degree. He had launched himself in the sea of life without even this Hindu sheet-anchor in his equipment. Nor had character training formed any part of his education.

IX.

“ Gentlemen, let me introduce to you Mr Chuckerbutty. We've never had a black doctor before, but, mind you, you're to treat him as a gentleman.”

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Such were the words uttered in bad old days by a bad old man, rather notorious for plain speech.

Colonel Burroughs did not herald the arrival of Tangri in any such terms. He heralded him not at all. He knew his officers well enough to realise that ukases in such cases were quite useless, and that they would receive this bird of a new feather entirely on his merits. Young Tangri was lucky in his regiment, which was a good one. Officers who joined it and who were not quite of the right kind either mended or wended their ways.

It is not customary to meet a new subaltern on his arrival. Yet on this occasion Tangri was met at the station by another subaltern, because it was thought that it would be a nice thing to do, and Jones was selected as the best man to do it.

The train drew up at the platform. A closely shuttered second-class compartment halted just where Jones was standing, and from it emerged a young Indian whom he guessed was the new arrival. He addressed the stranger, and learnt that this was so. He was about to enter the compartment in order to help out with the kit, when Tangri said—

“Excuse me ; it’s awfully kind of you, but my wife’s inside and she’s strictly purdah.”

Presently the lady, entirely covered by a burka with netted eyeholes, got out, followed by a small toddler in pink satin and spangles.

Jones was in a quandary. He and his pals had made room for Tangri in their bungalow, but this arrangement would never do for a man, his wife and a child. The difficulty was explained to Tangri, who said that ‘his wife and things’ could easily be left at the station till some other accommodation had been arranged. So the two men drove up to the mess, and here it was settled that the best

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thing to do under the circumstances was to take rooms at the dawk-bungalow or Rest House, and to secure them from the public gaze with a plentiful supply of a cheap matting called chittai, and in due course the family was installed here.

The last joined Sub. created good first impressions. He was nice-looking, nice-mannered and well turned-out. He was received exactly like any other newly joined officer. He was dined by the regiment and treated with the extreme courtesy that stranger-guests, even the youngest, always receive from a good regiment. Later on he was handed over to the care of a squadron commander, who complained that all the young entry always came to him. From first to last Tangri committed no blunders. The cards he left on the mess were correctly annotated, and his reply to the invitation to dine began in the third person and did not end with 'yours truly.'

The new subaltern had come fairly well provided with uniform and plain clothes, but had not as much as a stirrup-leather in the way of saddlery. But many another had joined in like case, and the remedy was a simple one. The regiment had a borrowing fund, and to this Tangri was at once advised to resort. The idea of borrowing did not come kindly to a Sowkar's son ; but on learning that the loan was to be obtained on the easiest of conditions, both as to interest and repayment, he bethought him, and borrowed to the limit permitted to a subaltern. But the results of the loan were disappointing—only a motor-bike. There seemed to him to be better value in a motor-bike than in a polo pony or saddlery.

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X.

We resume the thread of Tangri's career nine months later in the rainy season of the year. He is visibly thinner and apparently tired. He lies in a long chair, in pyjamas under a punkah, and his wife is squatting at his feet restoring that Kruschen feeling to his lower legs by massage. Two infants are rolling on the floor.

Says Bibi Fatma, the masseuse—

“Khawind (Lord), you are growing thinner daily.”

“Small wonder, living and working and playing with sahibs.”

“Tell me about these young sahibs, khawind. Why should they make you thin?”

“They would be beyond your understanding, Fatma. Even I find them hard to understand. But certainly I am thinner. Be easy there with that pummelling.”

“But still, tell me. Of their ladies I know something. We don't seem to find much to talk about when they come here. But my ayah tells me that they dance half-naked, and are no better than nautch-girls.”

“No, no. They're not like nautch-girls. Certainly they dance, but not half-naked. About one-third I should call it. Yes—counting the legs—which are practically bare—a good third.”

“Do you ever dance with them, khawind?”

“I used to in England, but not here. I asked one of them the other day, and she said, ‘Come and give me an ice.’”

But Fatma still wanted to know about the sahibs.

“Well,” said her husband, “they're different from us.”

“But how different?”

“For one thing, they are always trying to keep thin.”

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Fatma made a clicking noise, sign of amazement.

"Another thing is, they're never tired. They never want to sit down. With us, as you know, it is different. Then their talk is always of polo or racing or shikar, but they work like oxen treading out corn. They just go on and on, the same thing every day, and never seem to mind it. It bores me stiff. I'm always wanting to get back here and have a little rest and some food. And then, when they're not working with their men they're playing with them, and they expect me to. I didn't become an officer for that."

His wife made cooings and extremely sympathetic noises, and changed over from her lord's right to his left calf.

"You're digging your thumb in too hard. Go easy with that muscle. I strained it playing hockey. Then even on Thursdays, when a fellow might lie in bed, there's voluntary tent-pegging."

"What's 'voluntary'?" asked Fatma.

"Oh, voluntary means doing a thing only if you like to do it, but you've got to like voluntary tent-pegging."

"I expect it's all that wilayati pani (soda-water)," hazarded Fatma. "I'm told they're always drinking it. Nasty restless stuff."

"I don't think it's that. After all, wilayati pani is only water with air forced into it."

"Then it's the whisky sharab they put into it."

"No—it's not that. Because our sahibs say that whisky is fattening, and they drink very little of it. I told you you'd never understand. Now didn't I?"

"Yes," said his humble little helpmate.

After a while her husband continued—

"Then they never think about money except to spend it. None of them are rich. Some are in debt. But where

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I would spend an anna and think twice over it, they'll spend a rupee and think not at all."

Another and louder click from his wife.

"And there's another thing that beats me. You remember the other night when I was orderly officer and had to turn out the guard after midnight, and you persuaded me not to?"

"Yes—I remember it well," said Fatma. "It was raining hard. You were very tired. Besides, the guard and the sentries must have been all asleep by then, and would not have liked to be disturbed. You'd only have made yourself unpopular."

"Well," continued Tangri, "at the end of my tour of duty I had to sign a paper on my honour, saying I had turned out the guard after midnight. I signed it, of course."

"Naturally," said his wife, "or you would have got into trouble."

"Next day I mentioned it as a joke to Jones sahib. But he looked very grave, and said that they didn't do that sort of thing in the regiment. I asked him what *he* would have done. He said—but he had to think a bit before answering—'Oh, I think I should have turned out the guard.'"

"Well," said Mrs Tangri, "I don't see why you need worry about these little things. After all you're in great authority and an officer, and can do what you please; and your men look on you, I suppose, as a sort of god."

"Oughtn't these children to be in bed?" said Tangri rather suddenly. For his wife had touched on a sore spot.

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XI.

From Tangri's own village and now serving with him in the squadron were an Indian officer and several men. In the village Tangri had been in his proper place—*i.e.*, rather that of the under dog—and no one minded that. But now in the regiment it was otherwise. Here was a man younger than any of them, belonging to a class rather looked down on, set in authority over them. Further, he was a novelty. Hitherto they had served under none but white officers, heirs to the prestige of generations, and possessing a certain detachment from their men which greatly facilitated command. But there was no ostentation in the resentment, if the feelings amounted to as much. There were careful feelers put out to ascertain the attitude of the British officers in the matter; and these feelers receiving no encouragement whatever, it was quickly seen that that kite would not fly, and that their attempts to try it on with the new officer must be covert. There must be nothing to take hold of, and poor Tangri was subjected to a system of pin-pricks, very easily felt, but in no way actionable. He was wise in taking no action where no case could be established, unwise in not taking his squadron commander into his confidence. But he possessed his *amour propre*, and hoped things would right themselves.

Affairs, however, leaked out from the mouth of a young recruit who had imbibed the atmosphere but not the discretion to conceal the fact. He was asked by his squadron commander why he had failed to do such and such a thing. His reply was, "Oh, it was only the order of Tangri sahib." This sufficed to show which way the wind blew. Everything was done to make it blow the

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other way. But winds are not very biddable. Really the remedy lay in Tangri's hands, and he was bending to the blast rather than standing up to it. It would have taken a man of more character than he possessed to do so.

Nor was this his sole trouble. The Indian is a hearty and honest believer in nepotism. The family tie with him is a very strong one, and quite relentless. Britishers are not altogether immune from it—for has not some wag called the Punjab the land of the Five Rivaz? But the several thousand miles of distance separating Great Britain from India serve a purpose. It frees the British flea from nearly all the lesser fleas which afflict the Indian. They began to afflict Tangri either by letters or visits very early in his career. Vain were his attempts to make his applicants believe that a subaltern is rather less influential than mud on a man's shoes. They saw in him a way to good things, or rather to some good thing under Government, for all sought Government posts. Thus several relatives came at different times and quartered themselves on him, and none offered to be paying guests.

But first of all came his father—and he came as the holder of all the shares in a limited company, of which his son was in a manner of speaking manager. The Sowkar did not look for much of a dividend from the new venture. He expected a small one, but not much. He was a dabbler in the social rather than the financial market. So he came as a man might come to see a tin-mine or a sausage factory. And in this the East and West may be said to meet, for I well remember dining once with that sea-green incorruptible regiment, the 151st Lancers, on an occasion when Sir Harold Allnut, the great docks and harbour contractor, was a guest. He had risen from navvy to millionaire, and had put money into the 151st Lancers, or, in other words, young Harold. And young Harold was sore

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distressed by his parent's h-less ebullience during the meal.

But the Sowkar, though he insisted on being taken everywhere and introduced to everyone, was not a compromising guest. His wealth had added silk not blatancy to his manner. He now viewed his investment in intimate relations with sahibs, and was himself kindly and civilly treated by them. He concluded his visit well satisfied with the prospects of business. When he left he presented his daughter-in-law with a five-rupee note, instructing her to keep half for herself and to distribute the balance as largesse to servants.

But Tangri's other visitors were not so lavish.

XII.

I have not yet quite finished the tale of handicaps under which Tangri suffered thus early in his career.

What eventually knocked him out was courses. A course is that which prevents senior officers from stagnating in their profession, and ensures the growth in grace of juniors. And now Tangri was ordered to proceed to a distant part of India on a course lasting three months. To an ordinary subaltern such moves matter not at all. He shuts down a bachelor establishment, departs, and after a period rejoins and resumes regimental duty. The even tenor of his cheerful life is scarcely interrupted.

Tangri's wife could not accompany him, there being no accommodation for purdah ladies in the small hotel where married officers took their wives, nor could she be left behind, for India does not permit grass-widows. There was only one alternative, and that was to take her home—her husband's home, to be under mother-in-law,

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and under mother-in-law she spent ninety unhappy days. Fortunately she was illiterate, and could not disturb her husband's studies with tearful letters. But when he went to fetch her, she told him all about it.

He had hardly started family life again when the regiment was unexpectedly ordered on very distant manœuvres. This meant another absence of three months. And back the poor little wife had to go to mother-in-law. Next year there was a change of stations, and a long march to the new one. And back Fatma had to go again for the third time.

Now these migrations cost money, worry and time. Fatma had not broken into open mutiny—an Indian woman does not do that, but goes and lays her head across a railway line, or jumps into a well. But she became very restive in her gentle subdued way. The gilt on her gingerbread had long since worn off. Tangri marked the symptoms, and promised that never should she be left alone at his home again. And next time she went there he accompanied her on two months' leave. Things were better, but he rather ran to seed, and showed it on return to his regiment. And it had been an effort to return. Fear of his father drove him in great part to make it.

XIII.

Tangri having completed his third year's service, and his commanding officer having sent in the confidential report we saw him striving with in the first chapter, a bird was not long in coming home to roost. The report was sent off, and in due course reached authority. Authority read it, smiled and said, "This is our man. We'll try him with another." A little later Colonel Burroughs learnt that he might shortly expect 2nd Lieutenant

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Gupta Sen, son of an eminent Bengali Pleader, to join his regiment.

“What, another of them!” exclaimed the colonel; and it was only then that he realised that he had allowed justice to wait on generosity in the matter of Tangri and his confidential reports.

But he was not going to take this lying down. He seized a pen and began a vigorous protest. He had never been anything but a sticky penman, yet on this occasion he had covered a side of foolscap with trenchant and convincing reasons against Mr G. Sen; but on reading it over he realised all too quickly that every argument against Sen the undesirable was based on Tangri the utterly useless. His confidential reports on the latter rose up and smote him.

Like a wise man he dropped the pen and destroyed a stultifying document. What he could not write he could say. He decided on a personal interview with authority, and started without delay. Now Burroughs was one of those rather foolish regimental officers who avoid anything in tabs or brass hats. He was going to interview X., but he did not know him or what sort of fellow he was; and he was wondering how he should approach him—whether through the bowels and an appeal to X.'s softer nature, or whether bluffing or bullying would be better. The key to the situation was, however, handed to him when Y. chanced to enter the railway carriage in which Burroughs was travelling. Y. was an old friend and contemporary, and was soon in possession of the details of the trouble.

Y. produced a letter from a breast pocket, and spoke as follows:—

“You tell me you are going to interview X., who deals with these Indian appointments. Now I dislike him.

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He calls me by my Christian name and paws me when we meet, which, thank heaven, is seldom. I dislike him because he does what only the filthiest and most degraded type of soldier does: he panders to politicians. He dislikes this Army Indianisation business as much as anyone. In his present job, of course, he is bound to give it official favour, but he does so both in his private and his official capacity with far too much zest for an honest man. Now his wife's a cousin of mine, and their boy is my godson. He's at Wellington College, and this letter is from him. He writes: 'Dad says I'm no longer to go into the Indian Army like he did. He says it's not good enough now. He won't have me serving under an Indian.' Take the letter. I think it may be useful to you. Make no secret as to who gave it you. When I dislike a man, I like the feeling to be reciprocated. Next time perhaps he won't paw me."

On the following day the suave panderer to politicians received Colonel Burroughs with great *bonhomie* and plenty of soft soap. Thus, "We have been delighted to note how well this great enterprise has gone in your regiment. Of course we selected you and a few other commanding officers as men of breadth and vision, who would do their utmost by these newly commissioned Indians," and so on. It was with difficulty that Burroughs was able to interrupt the flow of soap-suds. At last he was able to say—

"I see you are heart and soul for this Indianisation business."

"My dear fellow," came the reply, "we are! we are!"

"As a matter of fact, I meant you yourself personally and in your private capacity," said Burroughs.

"But, my dear old man," rejoined X., "of course I am—none more so."

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"You are an O.W., I believe," said Burroughs. "So am I."

On this X. made pawing movements. He was visibly moved, but Burroughs held him off, and added—

"You've a son at the old place, I hear."

"We have—I mean I have," replied X.

"Following his father into the Indian Army, I suppose?" went on Burroughs.

"Well, we haven't quite decided yet. The boy's young yet," said X.

"Only rather over eighteen," mused Burroughs aloud. Then "I should have said *was* to have followed his father, but the Indian Army being no longer good enough, the boy is now to go into a British regiment."

X. looked sharply at Burroughs.

"You seem to take great interest in the boy," he remarked with less *bonhomie* and more suspicion.

"As a matter of fact, none whatever except so far as the interests of my regiment are affected," said Burroughs. "I have a letter from your boy here—Y. gave it me yesterday. I believe he's a friend of yours. He said he thought it might help me. I think it will. Of course, your boy may have taken you up wrong; but he writes clearly enough, and says you don't like these new Indian commissions, and that he is no longer for the Indian Army."

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Five minutes later Colonel Burroughs left. The parting was not very cordial. There were no ‘ old fellows ’ and no pawings. He had scarcely closed the door when he put his head in again with—

“ By the way, I don't believe I ever showed you your boy's letter. Here it is. Fair exchange ! ”

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Tangri felt that he would have to prick this bubble, and that there might be a nasty explosion—not loud, but very nasty. In his dilemma he was driven to do what he had never done before—consult his wife. He was glad he did so. For this surprising lady, who beyond the domestic orbit held scarce two ideas in her head, now

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